CULTURAL DISCOURSE ON THE MUSLIM WOMAN
IN
AFRICAN FRANCOPHONE LITERATURE

by

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A thesis in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of French
University of Toronto

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0-612-41551-1
In this study, we undertake a socio-cultural analysis of female existence in narrative spaces produced by African francophone writers of Muslim cultural background. We begin this analysis with the premise that one of the fundamental components of any culture is a set of values rooted in religious doctrine. Since the literary text is also a component of that same culture, we can state that texts produced in a Muslim cultural context are implicitly influenced by Islamic doctrine and traditions. In this intertextual study, an examination of the construction of space as well as spatio-temporal relationships in an Islamic society is followed by an analysis of the organization of gendered spaces along with that of female existence in narrative discourses by both male and female African Muslim writers.

One of the principal goals of this study is to describe precisely the role of Islamic socio-cultural norms in the creation of the Muslim female in the literary text. The social realist treatment of the female character by African Muslim
writers is not a simple mimetic production of a literary Islamic universe in which the female character is objectified and silenced by patriarchal practices. While maintaining a specific cultural context, the literary text also functions as an initiator of change, announcing a rupture with social realities as well as a social re-definition of the female character.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many who have assisted and supported me on the long journey that has culminated in this work.

I would like to begin by thanking Dr. Mary Donaldson-Evans of the University of Delaware. She had confidence in my academic abilities and without her encouragement I would not be writing this today. Additionally, I wish to thank Mrs. Susan C. Lee, who witnessed my personal transformation, and whose assistance in finding 'financial aid' eased the economic burden borne by many international students.

At the University of Toronto, I would like to thank my dissertation committee: Dr. Michael Marmura, Dr. Owen Miller and particularly, my thesis advisor Dr. Frederick I. Case for his constant guidance, moral support and intellectual insights.

I thank all my friends, both in the U.S.A. and Canada. Their light-hearted company, friendship and encouragement will always be remembered and appreciated. I am grateful for the generosity of all my Torontonian relatives, in particular, that of my two Khalas, who fed and housed me whenever the need presented itself.

With deep gratitude, I thank my parents, Zia Ul-Husain and Fizza Husain, for their faith, strength, and sacrifice as well as their belief in gender equality in education. Their courage in permitting a naive and protected teenager to travel halfway
around the world to pursue a university education cannot be underestimated.

I thank my eldest brother, Pervez Abdullah, for his assistance during crucial periods of my stay in Canada. I am grateful to Viqar Husain for always ‘being there’. He is not only a big brother but also a friend, advisor and confidante as well as an occasional emergency bank account.

My unyielding support on this difficult path has been my husband, Ulrich Hansen. He has made me laugh and has kept my spirits high and I will always be grateful for his patience.
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INTRODUCTION

The social, political, economic and spiritual status of the Muslim woman has become one of the most discussed topics of our era. From popular media coverage to serious intellectual studies, the Muslim woman has become a challenge, to be analyzed, vilified, condemned, pitied and glorified, all depending on national, regional, religious or personal allegiances and perspectives. Presenting an ambiguous figure, veiled or unveiled, oppressed or 'free', hidden or exposed, her image and identity have been freely discussed, often without her own input.

Television talk-show discussions, documentary and feature films as well as magazine and newspaper articles have all devoted much time to the subject of the Muslim woman as object. Popular literature recounting actual life stories, has not ignored her; bestsellers such as *Not Without My Daughter*¹, and *Princess: A true story of life behind the veil in Saudi Arabia*² have described the subjugation and repression of the female being in a Muslim society.

While critical works by both orthodox and unorthodox Muslim men and women as well as intellectuals from differing

socio-cultural backgrounds have examined and analyzed the construct 'Muslim woman' from historical, sociological and religious perspectives, literature has continued to be a domain where the analysis of the Muslim woman as a literary character has remained at a level of generalities. Literary critics have more often discussed the female character rather than the 'Muslim woman' character as a socialized being constructed from an ideology of female repression and objectification.

If, for the purpose of this study, which examines literary portrayals of the socialized female being, we begin with the statement:

a [literary] text is imbied with cultural versions of what constitutes a woman\(^3\)

then we, firstly, need to discuss what is meant by 'cultural' and, secondly, how this relates to our discussion and choice of francophone literature. If culture can be poetically defined as a "rich silk brocade of multicolored threads"\(^4\) which creates a particular social space, then each of these colored threads serves a specific purpose, and is equally significant in the construction of that space.

The term 'culture' has many definitions, it implies a set of shared values, common popular practices, a code of

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appropriate conduct as well as artistic products emanating from a social group. If a culture is a composition of all the elements, moral, spiritual, economic and artistic that make up a collective existence, then one can state that one of the basic structural components of a society is a set of values that have significant transformational power and are deeply rooted in a sacred/religious tradition:

On ne peut comprendre notre représentation du monde, nos conceptions philosophiques sur l'âme, sur l'immortalité, sur la vie, si l'on ne connaît pas les croyances religieuses qui ont été la forme première.

The religious ideology of a social group is fundamental to the creation of an organized society out of an existing chaos as well as in the construction of an existing, meaningful social being from the non-socialized male or female.

A religious ideology which assists the human being in making sense out of confusion, structuring order out of chaos, instilling a sense of being rather than nothingness, becomes a source of essential and existential definition which satisfies the "soif ontologique" of the human being.

The order constructed from a socio-sacral ideology, organizing physical space and imbibing the social being with essence, also

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creates a 'ritual topology' of significant life crises (such as birth, death etc.) which are related to the historical structure of a social group as well as to a sacred experience which is both transcendent and transhistorical.

For the purpose of this study, our focus will be on the structuring of space according to an ideology based on Islamic principles and the construction of the social being known as "Muslim". In this context, the identities and the ontology of males and females are constructed on the basis of gender role differences which are clearly specified by Islamic religious doctrine. The existence of a woman or a socialized female being is dependent on signifying practices which are male controlled and male produced but divinely prescribed.

It is with the intent of clarifying the socio-cultural structure of a society based on Islamic principles that Chapters I and II of this study are devoted to describing, firstly, the status of the Muslim woman in the socio-religious hierarchy of a community and, secondly, the spatio-temporal existence of the socialized being within sacred and profane spaces. This specific study of gender roles and sacro-social spatial ideology will provide the basis for a distinct interpretation of literary texts.

If literary texts, as a constituent of cultural production, are one of the threads of the 'rich brocade', then every such production as well as its reception takes place in a

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social, historical and economic context⁹. While not stating that literary texts are anthropological studies of the real, it is still significant to note that the writings of both female and male writers are quite commonly influenced by their socio-cultural surroundings as well as their religious backgrounds. As a product of society, influenced by cultural factors, literary texts are not a realist imitation of society but, by combining the real with the illusory, create 'l'effet de réel'¹⁰. In the creation of an image of the real, the literary text becomes:

[une] vision symbolique de la condition humaine, dans son être individuel et son être social¹¹

In this cultural production, be it symbolic, illusory or ambiguous in its depiction of reality, the portrayal of the character of the socialized being and particularly the character of the socialized female being is based on the dominant socio-religious ideology of the society in question. The socio-cultural signifiers influential in the literary construction of the female often reflect the quest for essence and existence of the female social being. In this respect, the creation of characters in a 'Muslim' literary space will follow


¹⁰ This term, first utilised by Roland Barthes, is quoted by Henri Mitterand in L'illusion réaliste (Paris: PUF, 1994) 6.

¹¹ Mitterand, L'illusion 29.
the ideological guidelines prescribed by Islamic doctrine for the socialization of the human being. Since the divine entity, in an Islamic socio-cultural context, creates all social beings and socio-cultural structures, then the literary character, a component of literary cultural production, is indirectly created by divine practice. This not only creates a value hierarchy in literary textual space, but also controls the portrayal of the Muslim female character, who is silenced by patriarchal practices in the literary Islamic universe.

With the intention of analyzing literary Islamic universes and the portrayal of the female being, our choice of francophone literature was immediately reduced to the quite large geographical space of countries with a Muslim majority which have been colonized by France and where a written form of literature exists in French. Based on the criteria of language and religion, our geographical space is restricted to North Africa and Western Africa south of the Sahara. Limited further by our intention to concentrate on the character of the Muslim woman, our selection of literary texts was determined by the type of female that is portrayed in various narrative discourses.

While this study could have easily been limited to analyzing texts from the Maghreb (Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria), which are rich, varied as well as stereotypical in the depiction of female characters, we were equally concerned with the separation that is constantly maintained between
Africa north and south of the Sahara. The influence of Arabic traditions and the Arabic language vary greatly in these two regions divided by the Sahara, nonetheless, the peoples of these two vast areas are united by a common religious ideology: Islam.

Having decided to bridge the Sahara by studying the construction of the female character in the literary narratives of both regions, we limited our study to Morocco, Algeria and Senegal. While not irrelevant to our study, Tunisia was excluded so as not to further askew our study, while our research for relevant literary narratives from sub-Saharan francophone Muslim countries such as Mali, Mauritania and Chad proved fruitless. We further attempted, rather unsuccessfully, to balance our choice with an equal number of texts by male and female writers. Our final choice was limited to ten authors, five from the Maghreb and five from Senegal, three of which are women. From the Maghreb, we have chosen to study the literary narratives of the Moroccan writers Driss Chraïbi and Abdelhak Serhane, and the Algerian writers Assia Djebar, Ali Ghalem and Rachid Boudjedra. The Senegalese writers whose texts are essential to this study are Miriama Bâ, Aminata Sow Fall, Ousmane Sembène, Abdoulaye Sadji and Cheik Aliou Ndao.

While remaining within the context of our study, we have attempted to refer to as many works by these writers as possible. However, the difficult choice of texts which had to be made does not prevent us from including relevant references
to significant discourses by other writers such as Tahar Ben Jelloun.

We have stated that our choice of literary texts was guided by a desire to breach the distance that has existed between literatures from north and from south of the Sahara by uniting them under the banner of 'literature by Muslim writers from francophone Islamic countries'. Our principal premise for the analysis that has been carried out in this study is that the space which constitutes a Muslim society is structured and divided according to clear guidelines. The socio-religious guidelines which structure any space are also the foundation of gender based differences, which are often exemplified by spatial boundaries. The gendered spaces of a Muslim society separate the socio-economic functions of male and female social beings and, furthermore, transform the socialized female being into a repository of traditional taboos and religious interdictions. These spatial divisions and the existing gendered power hierarchy which tacitly influence both male and female francophone Muslim writers, create the intertextual link between the divine text and earthly texts.

Since the colors of the 'rich silk brocade' are, in the context of a Muslim space, dependent on The Word of The Sacred Book, then 'the profane word' of the literary text, which is just one thread of the whole, will always, whether imitating, criticizing or fantasizing, reflect that which gave it existence.
In producing a 'symbolic vision' of the condition of the Muslim being in a narrative space, francophone Muslim writers have created characters that often exist in and are defined by a textual space reminiscent of real Muslim spaces. The literary portrayal of the female Muslim being, whose socio-cultural subjugation at various levels of existence is transformed into fictional, literary problems, is the focus of this study.

Recognizant of the fact that culturally specific female stereotypes are often used in the portrayal of literary characters, we have divided the work into chapters which specifically define a particular state of female existence. Since different spatial boundaries signify different levels of existence, Chapter III, IV and V concentrate on the subjugated and dependent condition of the female character within monogamous and various polygamous marital spaces. Chapter VI studies the unique social situation of female characters whose existence is not limited by traditional spatial boundaries, while Chapters VII and VIII move beyond the mimetic narrative depiction of traditional spaces to the creation of spaces where the character of the Muslim female being attempts to satisfy her 'ontological thirst'.

The obvious concentration on spatial boundaries in analyzing the construction of narrative social spaces and the depiction of literary characters is, in our opinion, necessary.  

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12 Allen, 281.
for demonstrating that the often subtle and implicit socio-cultural and traditional influences as well as religious inspiration are an integral component of literary production in the Muslim world.

Referring to the spatial directives of The Word along with the interpretations of The Word to better comprehend the creation of boundaries in the spaces of 'the word' has given us the opportunity to analyze the existence of the female character, not in generalized socio-cultural terms, but as a socialized being in the specific cultural context of a Muslim society.
CHAPTER I

PATRIARCHY AND ISLAMIC SOCIETY

In establishing a discourse for a literary corpus that is deeply rooted in realist expression, one must examine and analyze the socio-cultural codes that guide the particular society whose literature is being studied. Under such a premise, it becomes imperative, before a study of African Islamic literature can be undertaken, to examine the African Islamic societies within which the literature is produced. This can be done by studying the underlying ideology that assists in the construction, establishment and perpetuation of the dominant social structures of any given society.

From the underlying social ideology, in our case an Islamic ideology of social constructs, emanate socio-cultural factors which have become deeply rooted within the social fabric of a community. Although originating from a specific, dated ideology, these factors form part of a continuity that dates back more than a few millennia. The study of these socio-cultural factors is essential to our analysis, because they have a profound effect on the African Islamic literature that is being produced today within the societies in question. Of particular interest to our study of female literary characterization is a deconstruction of the codes as well as an inquiry into the creation of power hierarchies which govern society.
It is an often stated fact that throughout the history of human societies, the establishment of social systems has been based upon a gendered system of power division. Social structuring has been administered and controlled by men based on principles which have enhanced their own domination and have, effectively, ensured the subjugation of women. According to Gerda Lerner, no society or cultural group has ever existed where women have had decision making power as a result of which they have, in any way, significantly dominated men. Lerner additionally declares that:

male dominance is a historical phenomenon in that it arose out of a biologically determined given situation and became a culturally created and enforced structure over time.

What must be examined is how this male dominance, initially a "biological given", due to the time required by the female for child birth, established itself as a socio-cultural truism and has since been continuously perpetuated in all cultures and societies that have ever existed.

The social domination of men originated with the beginnings of a sedentary lifestyle and the acquisition of land and private property. This movement from a nomadic existence to a more

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1 Gerda Lerner establishes clearly in The Creation of Patriarchy (London: Oxford UP, 1986), the historical basis of modern day patriarchal societies.

2 Lerner, The Creation 42.

immovable one, ushered in a change in the organization of the social structures of the time. One effect of this development was the diminished importance of the woman, as her function in the economic and nutritional support of the household became steadily redundant, while her procreating capacity became further emphasized. When different peoples began to lead a sedentary existence, the desire for possessing land for cultivation and residence became a 'natural' given. Along with the acquisition of land, another new social concept became evident: that of the heir, the inheritor of property.

As a consequence of this desire for an inheritor, the emphasis on the reproductive capacities of women remained. The requirement that the female produce heirs was not enough since the male needed assurance of the biological paternity of the child. This male urge to ensure a legitimate heir systematically reduced the woman to a specific gender role and social position, effectively limiting her sexuality to a monogamous relationship.

Another factor that assisted in the subjugation of women, according to Claude Lévi-Strauss⁴, was the cultural concept of incest that forbade endogamous⁵ marriages. This rule, which exists in various forms in most known cultures, forbids marriage with various female relatives and results in the


⁵ Endogamy is marriage within a restricted social group, that is, between members of the same family or clan.
necessary exchange of females. As a consequence of this law, women were frequently offered in marriage to the males of other families or clans. The female thus became a commodity to be traded and bartered according to the will of male relatives. As an exchangeable and desirable commodity, the female also played an important role during clan or ethnic warfare and in establishing alliances and truces.

These two concepts, that of the acquisition of private property and the prohibition of incest, were crucial in defining and establishing the socio-cultural role of the female gender. At this juncture, one can state that the family unit was, commonly, made up of males of the same genetic line with wives obtained, for the most part, through inter-family exchanges. Daughters, within this family structure, were important and valued as a commodity for exchange and male offspring having the same genetic male line became the 'natural' heirs to any private property.

The basic family unit was the extended patriarchal family dominated by the eldest male member. Women within this context were appreciated for their reproductive capabilities, particularly their ability to produce a male heir with guaranteed legitimacy. This requirement of legitimacy, this male longing to assure for himself and his land a heir of his own blood line, led to restrictions on the sexuality of the woman. As a consequence, her chastity before marriage, i.e.
her virginity and her faithfulness within the institution of marriage, became essential requirements:

La fidelité féminine a pour première finalité de protéger l’héritier de l’homme.⁶

This generalized and brief summary provides us with a background upon which we will develop a socio-cultural basis for our study of African Islamic literature.

Within the communities that have, as their founding base, one of the three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity or Islam, the already mentioned patriarchal and patrilineal social trends were maintained and further engrained in the psyche of the people. With the establishment of a single omnipotent deity, men not only successfully produced a patriarchal hierarchy, with God as the distributor of power, but also appropriated the power to construct and maintain a community according to clearly defined laws and cultural codes.

As a consequence, the patriarchal structure which began within the family unit with the father as the head of the household was expanded to encompass the whole society. In this modified society based upon religious dogma, the foremost function of men was as rulers who implemented laws transmitted to them by the new all powerful patriarchal head - a divine entity - whose word was law, and according to whose laws every transgression was severely punished.

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The third monotheistic religion of our time, Islam, which is deeply rooted in the Judeo-Christian patriarchal traditions and ideological codes, developed in the seventh century AD. With Abraham as the grand patriarch and following in the footsteps of the many male prophets including Moses and Jesus, Muhammed Ibn Abdullah⁷ (570-632) effectively destroyed the goddess worship that was prevalent in the Arabian peninsula. After the destruction of Al-Lât, Manât and Al-'Uzza, the three most powerful goddesses of the Hijâz⁸, the creed of the one omnipotent deity, God or Allah⁹ was established. With the worship of the one God, Allah, the economic base of the city of Mecca¹⁰ where merchants gathered to worship their many idols was disrupted. With the popularity of this new religion on the rise, the tribal structure of the Hijâzî society was broken and a new allegiance was created. The converts to Islam no longer owed loyalty to their tribe but to the new spiritual and

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⁷ In 610 AD Muhammad is said to have received the first of the divine revelations that comprise the Qur'ân. For details on the life of Muhammed see Encyclopaedia of Islam (London: Luzac & Co., 1965).

⁸ The Hijâz is the western section of the Arabian peninsula where the Muslim holy cities of Mecca and Medina are located.

⁹ Allah in Arabic is derived from Al-Lah which means 'The God'. This term was used in the pre-Islamic era, where the three goddesses Al-Lat, Manat, and Al-Uzza were considered to be the daughters of Al-Lah.

¹⁰ During the time of Muhammed, Mecca was a major commercial and cultural center, where merchants sold their wares and poetry competitions were held. With the Ka'aba, the sacred space and monument where idols were kept, Mecca was also an important religious center.
social ideology which constructed a community based on obedience to Allah\textsuperscript{11}.

This new religion, Islam (إسلام), which means submission, in this case to the will of Allah, was essential in undermining the existent tribal social structure of the Arabian peninsula. As a consequence, in the city of Medina, Muhammed with the initial group of converts to Islam\textsuperscript{12}, began the construction of a new society based on the newly revealed divine laws. The Islamic community or ummah (عَمَّةٌ) became the new social organization and spatial structure to which all Muslims automatically belong. At the foundation of this structure is the power and will of Allah, the omnipotent and omniscient deity, to whose will all Muslims, by definition of their very name, must submit.

Within the ummah, most tribal social codes became invalid and laws, which were often specific to problems faced by this new community, were promulgated based on the divine revelations. Consequently, the subject of these revelations ranges from war and politics to family issues, such as marriage, polygamy, divorce and inheritance rights. Those issues dealing solely with the Muslim family structure comprise

\textsuperscript{11} These comments are intended to provide only a very general outline. It is imperative to recognize that the reconstruction of Hijazi society was a complex and lengthy process, a detailed description of which is outside and beyond the scope of this study.

\textsuperscript{12} The words Islam and Muslim are derived from the same Arabic root SLM (سلام); a Muslim is one who submits to or follows the tenets of the religion of Islam.
the Šarī'ah, the Islamic family law, practiced in one form or another in most Islamic societies.

After the death of Muhammed, to clarify the socio-cultural codes of the ummah, certain scholars, among whom the best known are Al-Bukhârî and Imam Muslim, collected, from various authenticated sources, the sayings and accounts of the Prophet's actions. These accounts, supposedly verified by a precise chain of transmitters13 comprise the Hadîth. For the members of the ummah, these accounts of the Prophet's life provide an example to be followed and imitated.

As the number of converts increased, this new community based on the laws and limits set by divine orders stabilized and, eventually, its political power and military strength grew. With increased importance and power, Islam spread beyond the Arabian peninsula and the ummah began to absorb peoples of diverse ethnic backgrounds whose traditions and laws were either abandoned or, more realistically, were modified and blended into the culture of the existent ummah 14.

Despite the variations, based on ethnic values and traditions in "The Islamic Culture"15, that exist at the

13 It is imperative to note that the attribution of a hadîth and the consequential declaration of its authenticity by the establishment of the names of transmitters or isnâd is a complex process. For details refer to John Burton, An Introduction to the Hadîth (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994).


15 The emphasis on this term is an attempt to illustrate that a monolithic Islamic culture does not actually exist. Although certain fundamental principles are uniform across cultures they are still subject to
present day in Muslim countries ranging from Indonesia to Morocco, there are certain concepts and ideas that remain consistent throughout the Muslim world. These universal concepts derived from the divine Islamic discourse are what Fatna Aït Sabbah defines as the orthodox discourse:

Le discours orthodoxe est le discours du pouvoir. Il n’est pas simplement discours sur le pouvoir, il est pouvoir. En tant que tel il agence l’univers, organise ses éléments et les indexes dans un système global de signes et messages précis, celui de l’ordre culturel musulman.16

Within this 'management of the universe' is incorporated a specific ideology on the social status of the Muslim woman. Her position and participation within the ummah are subject to clear and strict guidelines.

In this study, we will examine the hierarchy of the Islamic community which, following socio-religious principles, recreates a centuries old patriarchal order of power, submission and obedience. An evaluation of the social status of the Muslim woman within this Islamic hierarchical structure will enable us to analyze the construction of narrative social space by African Muslim novelists. It is our opinion that the status of the female character in narrative social spaces in African Islamic literature is a reflection of the social status of Muslim women in a realist Islamic space.

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It is, however, insufficient to state that Islam continued a patriarchal order established by previous civilizations and the two other monotheistic religions. One needs to examine how this patriarchal order became established and entrenched in the Islamic tradition, and became engrained in the Muslim male psyche.

It has been already mentioned that the word Islam, originating in the Arabic root SLM, is defined in the dictionary as "submission, resignation to the will of God" whereas the verbal form means "to submit, surrender, or resign" as well as "to be secure, to be protected from harm". Therefore, the name of the religion itself establishes the submission of a whole community, and the term 'Muslim', a derivative of SLM, defines every believer as "one who submits". The absolute power and complete control of Allah is revealed in the word Islam and this word establishes the first level of the hierarchy.

At this level, Allah, always referred to with the masculine pronoun huwa (هو) is the divine controller who has given His laws to man, and has thus set the limits of human behavior and social conduct. It is within the limits of these laws of Allah (حدود الله) that every member of the community must abide. Submission and obedience to the established laws implies a secure and protected environment within which a

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community can thrive. This relationship between Allah and his believers is centered upon the desire of the believer to attain Paradise (jannah). The delights of Paradise and the fear of eternal punishment in Hell (jannaham) force the believer to remain within the prescribed limits upon which the ummah is founded.

As the all-powerful and omniscient deity, Allah is ever present at the apex of the spiritual and social hierarchy. He further defines the community by placing the male being in a higher spiritual category. This male superiority is established by claiming that only men are granted the privilege of communicating the word of Allah, the divine revelation, through the call of prophecy. Allah declares in the surah al-anbiya':

Avant toi nous n'avons envoyé que des hommes qui recevaient des révélations

وما أرسلنا قبلك الا رجالاً نوحى اليهم...

In this verse the word "hommes" does not refer to man as the human race but specifically to the male gender. The Arabic word for human being is insân (إنسان) and is used in various verses of the Qur'ân, however, in this verse the noun used is rijâl (رجال) which is the plural of the word 'man' rajul (رجل). In the creation of this fundamental spiritual hierarchy, males are clearly placed at a higher level than females who are never in direct contact with the divine

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discourse\textsuperscript{19}. Females receive the content of the revelation second hand, through the intermediary of man, who is the representative of Allah, and the receiver and interpreter of His word.

This thesis of an Islamic spiritual and social order is developed in detail by Fatna Aït Sabbah in \textit{La femme dans l'inconscient musulman}\textsuperscript{20}. She states that along with the creation of human beings, Allah established a fundamental hierarchical space which organizes relationships in the following way:

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{c}
L'\text{\^e}tre divin \\
| \\
L'\text{\^e}tre humain du sexe masculin \\
| \\
L'\text{\^e}tre humain du sexe féminin \\
| \\
Les enfants\textsuperscript{21}
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

Figure 1.1 - Fatna Aït Sabbah's Socio-religious Hierarchy

In the Islamic version of creation which mirrors that of the Judeo-Christian tradition, Adam was the first human created by Allah and Hawwâ' (Eve) was a secondary creation from Adam.

\textsuperscript{19} The exception to this is the account of the angel Gabriel communicating the word of Allah to Maryam, mother of 'Îsa, to whom a whole chapter, \textit{Surah Maryam} (XIX) is dedicated. Maryam receives the message of Allah directly, however, it must be pointed out that Maryam functions as a vessel for the male prophet who will spread the divine word. Her spiritual elevation is not as a prophetess but as the mother of a prophet.

\textsuperscript{20} Sabbah 119-146.

\textsuperscript{21} Sabbah 132.
Eve, made from Adam's body, in other words, given birth to through Adam, has the sole function of being his companion. The Qur'ān states:

... Créateur des cieux et de la terre. Il vous a donné des épouses (issues) de vous-mêmes ...

الله، من أنفسكم ازوجا...  

Allah, through his laws, maintains spiritual superiority, occupying at the same time, the position of the social head of the Islamic community. Within the ummah, there is one social structure essential to the functioning of society and to the perpetuation of the previously established hierarchical order. This necessary elementary unit is the Muslim family. Within this family structure, the gender dynamics that govern its functioning and organization are imperative in maintaining the fixed and divinely authorized male hegemony.

Within a given Muslim family structure, the most important institution is that of marriage. The guidelines for an Islamic marriage follow what Lévi-Strauss elucidates as the laws of incest and consequently, the exchange of women. Although, in most Islamic societies cousin marriages are encouraged, particularly among patrilineal cousins, the Qur'ān explicitly forbids marriage with certain women belonging to the immediate blood line of the male:

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22 Le Saint Coran, Surah al-shûrâ (XLII): 11. Surah al-rum (XXX): 20-21, also mention the creation of Eve by Allah from Adam. Although the Qur'ān does not directly claim that Eve tempted Adam in the Garden of Eden, the Muslim tradition, following the Judeo-Christian, perceives Eve as the misguided one, who tempted Adam to eat of the fruit of knowledge.
Vous sont interdites vos mères, filles, soeurs, tantes paternelles et tantes maternelles, filles d’un frère et filles d’une soeur, mères qui vous ont allaités, soeurs de lait, mères de vos femmes, belles-filles sous votre tutelle et issues des femmes avec qui vous avez consommé le mariage... les femmes de vos fils nés de vos reins; de même que deux soeurs réunies ...

حرمت عليكم أمهتكم وبناتكم وأخوكم وعمتكم وختكم ونبات الآخ وبنات الأخ وأمهتكم التي إرضعتمكم وأخوكم من الرضعة وأمهت نساكم وربيكم التي في حجركم من نساكم التي دخلتم بهن فان لم تكونوا ادخلتم بهن فلا جناح عليكم وحيل

ابنائيكم الذين من اصليكم وان تجمعوا بين الأختين ...

These laws necessitate the exchange of women to whom marriage is forbidden, and thus the women mentioned in the above verses pass from the paternalistic dominance of their male relatives, usually fathers or brothers, to that of their husbands.

The superiority of the husband within the Islamic institution of marriage is confirmed in surah al-baqara:

... Mais les hommes ont cependant une prédominance sur elles. Et Allah est puissant et sage.

...24

Along with having been selected as the guardians and the perpetuators of the faith, men are also granted superiority within the social and economic domains of the ummah.

In the context of the marriage contract, as defined by the Shari'ah, the husband is obligated to satisfy the economic

23 Le Saint Coran, Surah al-nisa’ (IV): 23.

24 Le Saint Coran, Surah al-baqara (II): 228.
needs of a woman by providing lodging, clothing and food. This economic sustenance provided to the wife is referred to in Arabic as nafaqa (نفقة) and the Qur'ān states explicitly:

Les hommes sont les directeurs pour les femmes à cause de l'excellence qu'entre eux Dieu accorde les uns sur les autres, ainsi que la dépense qu'ils font de leurs biens.

This verse effectively removes the woman from the economic sphere and puts her under the direct financial control of the male, usually the father, the husband or the brother. As a consequence of the law of nafaqa, the power of the woman is limited and she is reduced to living under the constant guardianship of the male in a virilocal family unit. Her economic stability and equality are further undermined by the Islamic laws of inheritance.

Islam, through specific guidelines, has provided an inferior place for the female being within the ummah. With the possession of the reins of economic control, man, by divine sanction, has been able to gain not only monetary, but also political power. Divine will empowers men and grants them

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25 Sabbah 47. For a definition of nafaqa refer to Hans Wehr Dictionary 987-988.

26 *Le Saint Coran, Surah al-nisa' (IV):* 34. The Arabic word used for "directeur" is quwwam (قوم) which can also have the following meanings: caretaker, protector, or provider.

27 By Islamic law, female offspring inherit only one third of all property, male offspring two thirds. See *Le Saint Coran, Surah al-nisa' (IV):* 11-12.
control of the female gender in both the economic and domestic domains. In this process of social hierarchization and male dominance, which exists in all patriarchal societies, the reification of the female gender becomes a 'natural' consequence. Fatna Aït Sabbah states that:

La relation entre les sexes n’est qu’un reflet et une incarnation de la relation fondamentale qui structure la relation entre le Dieu maître et son croyant esclave. Cette relation [entre les sexes] est modelée selon le désir du maître, le mari. Le désir de la femme n’est jamais exprimé.

... Le monopole divin de tout ce qui existe introduit un élément qui rend impossible toute notion d’échange dans la relation. En fait une des parties figure parmi les possessions de l’autre. L’être divin possède le croyant. Le rapport de possession annihile la possibilité d’échange.28

Following this process of possession and obedience of the possessors' desires, Islam continues along the age old path of female objectification. The word of Allah, as revealed to Muhammed, assists man in degrading the woman to the position of a material possession. Disempowered and relegated to a lower social status than the male, the woman is resigned to being one of the many possessions of man. The Qur‘ân declares:

On a enjolivé aux gens l’amour des choses qu’ils désirent: femmes, enfants, trésors thésaurisés d’or et d’argent, chevaux marqués, bétail et champs; tout cela est l’objet de jouissance...

لزین للناس حب الشهوات من النساء والبنين والكثاطير المقنطرة من الذهب والفضة والخيل المسومة والانعام

28 Sabbah 148-149.
This objectification of women is underlined by a hadîth recorded by Imam Muslim who quoted the prophet as having said:

Le monde est un bien et que le meilleur bien c'est (encore) la femme vertueuse.³⁰

As a consequence of the establishment of a spiritual and social hierarchy based on Islamic principles, a precise and confined status has been determined for the woman. It is through this spiritual and social superiority, ordained by divine law, that men have established a base of power, the modification of which would signify a human interference in the divine plan for social structuring.

Due to the rigidity of orthodox Islamic doctrine and the severe consequences outlined for anyone who oversteps the limits set by Allah, women often become the accomplices of men. The unvarying structure of the ummah is often internalized by the woman and she becomes an unwitting ally in the male quest for constant and eternal hegemony.

The greatest threat to patriarchal power and the Islamic hierarchy is any form of empowerment and questioning of the existent order on the part of the subjugated segment of society. Men have been granted power and domination over women, any attempt by women to question that power becomes a

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²⁹ Le Saint Coran, Surah al-'imran (III): 14. The Arabic word al-banuna (البنين) is translated as "enfants" but can also mean "boys".

threat. The possibility of female non-compliance is perceived as a potential questioning of the superior social status of men. Female defiance would be construed as an interference in the divine plan as well as a defiance of the divine discourse that organizes the universe.

Despite any complicity that may exist between the Muslim male and female, it is an obligation for the man to protect the Islamized patriarchy and the divine discourse from a constant female threat, real or imagined. To fight this common threat to spiritual and social stability, man and God have united in creating a number of concepts which assist in solidifying and further limiting the status of women.

These underlying concepts, which will presently be discussed, play a critical role in the development of the concept of a 'believing woman' and of the criteria that determine female 'being' in Islamic socio-cultural discourse. The social institutions and cultural codes that define and position women inside certain divinely determined frontiers will be critical to our study of African Islamic literature.

As was stated earlier, a carefully structured family unit is the base upon which the ummah is constructed. The woman never exists outside the family unit as an independent individual but is always defined by her relationship to a man, be he her father, brother, husband or son. Marriage being an essential part of this structure; it is within the institution
of the Islamic marriage that the submission and silence of the female will is realized.

The Islamic concept of Allah, whose will and power control the believer, is applied to the relationship between husband and wife. The popular orthodox theologian S. Abul A’la Maududi states that “his [the husband’s] authority symbolizes that of God in the world”. Fatima Heeren writes in Woman in Islam that a woman’s sole role should be as a wife and mother, she continues by stating:

... submission to the will of God, if applied to family life, means accepting the desires inherent in man’s nature and living up to them ...

A proverbial hadith claims that the Prophet Muhammed stated that ‘the best woman is she who, when you see her you are pleased, and when you direct her she obeys’. The Qur’ân states:

Les femmes vertueuses sont obéissantes (à leurs maris), et protègent ce qui doit être protégé ...

... فالصالحات قانتات حافظات للبيب ...

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31 Maududi, a South Asian theologian, has influenced orthodox movements in South Asia as well as the Middle East. Along with a lengthy exegesis to accompany his translation of the Qur’ân, he has written Purdah and the Status of Woman in Islam (Lahore: Islamic Publications Ltd., 1992).


33 Lemu and Heeren 34.

34 Le Saint Coran, Surah al-nisa’ (IV):34.
This obedience to the husband is the Islamic concept of tâ`ah (طاعة), which is defined as "obedience, compliance, submissiveness". The Muslim woman:

must practice tâ`ah, the submission of the woman to her husband's will and desires... she does not have the right to leave his house (or the conjugal bed).

An elaboration of this concept can be found in Islamic law. The Sharî'ah includes the rule of 'the house of obedience' or bait al-tâ`ah (بيت الطاعة) which states that a woman who leaves her husband without his permission must be forcefully returned to his house, 'the house of obedience'. Naoual El-Sadaoui states in La Face cachée d'Eve, that in many Muslim countries:

...lorsqu'une femme ... s'enfuit ou se réfugie chez les siens, le mari peut faire appel au Beit El-Ta’a, c'est-à-dire qu'il peut la forcer à revenir chez lui sous escorte policière ...

This concept creates an obvious power structure within the household as a consequence of which the woman becomes and remains dependent on the will and desires of her husband. A woman who is obedient to her husband will also obey the limits established by Allah, since any transgression on her part would bring ma'arrah (معرة): shame, disgrace, or stigma not only upon herself but also upon her family. Hence, to control

35 Cowan, ed., 573.


38 Cowan, ed., 601. Ma'arrah is a derivative of the verbal 'arra which means 'to be a shame, be a disgrace; to bring shame or disgrace'.
women, man ingeniously grants her the moral responsibility of ‘ird (عرض): honor, dignity or good repute 39. Thus the woman, by her own behavior and conformity to Islamic laws and social codes becomes the protector of male honor.

Aside from these moral codes of honor and dishonor which assist the woman in maintaining her status, her position as wife can be defined by insecurity and instability. This lack of stability which implies powerlessness also arises from the social institutions of polygamy and repudiation.

Without going into great detail, we will briefly outline polygamy and repudiation within the social context of the ummah. Polygamy or rather polygyny, referred to as ta’addud al zawjât 40 in Arabic, was a common practice in pre-Islamic Arabia. Islam permitted polygyny but restricted men to a maximum of four concurrent wives 41 based upon certain conditions. The Qur’án qualified this permission by stating that the husband has to guarantee the nafaqa, that is, the economic sustenance of each wife and has to be just and equal in all aspects of conjugal relations.

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39 Cowan, ed., 604.
40 Cowan, ed., 595.
41 Le Saint Coran, Surah al-nisa’ (IV): 3:

… Il est permis d'épouser deux, trois, quatre, parmi les femmes qui vous plaisent.
فانحكموا امكاني لكم من النساء مثنى وثلث وربع
Although many interpretations in defense of and against polygyny exist, the fundamental fact that it has been permitted has a significant effect on the status of the woman. It reduces the female to a passive being which the male uses for his sexual needs. Mernissi states:

La polygamie ... donne à l'homme libre cours sans prendre en considération les besoins de la femme, celle-ci étant considérée comme un simple "intermédiaire" dans le processus.43

In a realistic social context, as a first and only wife, a woman occupies a position of honor and prestige. When the husband re-marries, the familial and social prestige of the other co-wife/wives diminishes.

Polygyny grants the male power to do as he desires, to 'exalt' whom he wants and to socially and emotionally reify whom he wants. This control of the daily existence of a woman and her marital status is solidified by the laws of divorce or repudiation. Within the bounds of Islamic law, the power to divorce as well as the right to polygamy is an exclusive male right. The man is permitted to 'take' in marriage the women who please him, equally it is stated that he can substitute one woman for another:

Si vous voulez substituer une épouse à une autre, et que vous avez donné à l'une un


44 We use the term re-marries for the lack of a better one. Re-marry in this context always refers to a man marrying a second, third or fourth concurrent wife.
This exchange of women can be carried out following the law of *talâq bil talâtah* (طلاق بالثلاثة) which is the verbal or written repetition of the expression, 'I divorce thee', three times with designated intervals of time between each pronouncement. The wife is a spectator in this process, waiting in a state of limbo during the time intervals to hear the words that will decide her fate, wondering if the husband will utter the third definitive statement or if he will change his mind and take her back. Often the husband, on a whim, can repeat the required expression three times without any time lapse. This has been referred to as 'innovative divorce' or *talâq al bid'ah* (طلاق البدعة) and is considered 'undesirable but binding'\(^{46}\). These polygyny and divorce laws are constructed to control the woman by keeping her status in marriage, which is the desired status for a woman, unstable and insecure at all times.

To maintain a comprehensive, all-inclusive psychological, emotional and physical control of female existence, the woman in Islamic societies and in the Muslim male psyche has to, additionally, be attributed with qualities that constitute a threat to the domination and power granted to the male. In


\(^{46}\) Doi, *Shari'ah* 176-179.
order to keep the structure of the ummah intact and to further cement the inferior and dependent social position of the female, negative concepts are attributed to her personality which make this female threat more tangible and this requirement for obedience more necessary.

The first of these negative concepts is that of nushûz (نشوز) which is defined by the dictionary as:

animosity, discord, the recalcitrance of the woman toward her husband, brutal treatment of the wife by her husband.47

Fatima Mernissi quoting Abu Hamid Al-Ghazâlî48 defines a nâshizah (ناشزة) as a wife who confronts her husband either in act or word49. It is additionally defined as: “a recalcitrant woman, shrew”50. Any act of nushûz on the part of the woman is not only a destabilization of the fundamental family unit where the husband is the superior partner, but also that of the whole community where men hold the reins of power. As a consequence, nushûz is considered a worldly rebellion as well as spiritual subversion against the divine law51.

47 Cowan, ed., 966.


50 Cowan, ed., 966.

51 Mernissi, Femininity 90.
A woman who does not observe the law of obedience, *bait al-tâ`ah*, may be defined as a *nâshizah*, and for such a woman, divine and worldly retribution are enjoined by the laws of the ummah. In a *hadîth* collected by Al-Bukhâri\(^{52}\), Muhammed upon his return from the Miraj\(^{53}\) states:

\[\text{J'ai eu la connaissance du Feu, et j'ai vu que la plupart de ceux qui s'y trouvaient étaient des femmes.}\]  

When questioned by one of his companions on why this was the case, Muhammed is said to have answered:

\[\text{c'est envers leurs maris qu'elles avaient fait preuve d'ingratitude}\]  

Before this divine and eternal damnation is meted out to the disobedient woman, her punishment on earth, by her husband is clearly stated. This worldly punishment is explained in the *Qur'ân*:

\[\text{Et quant à elles dont vous craignez l'infidélité, exhortez-les, abandonnez-les dans leurs lits, et battez-les.}\]

\[\text{والَّن تَخافُون نَشْوَهُن فَعَظُوهُن وَأَهْجُرُوهُن فِي المَضَايِعَ وَاضْرِبُوهُن}\]  

In reading this translation, one may be misled by the word "infidélité" since the word *nushûz* is used in the Arabic text.


\(^{53}\) The *Miraj* is the nocturnal transcendental journey Muhammed is supposed to have made from Medina to Jerusalem and subsequently to the Heavens.

\(^{54}\) Al-Bukhâri, *L'authentique* 230.


\(^{56}\) *Le Saint Coran*, *Surah al-nisa'* (IV): 34.
A more appropriate translation may be "indocilité" used by Ghassan Ascha or hostility and animosity. Certain translations also use the word "désobéissance". The exegesis commenting on the command "battez-les" explains that the husband should beat his wife (wives):

pas violemment, mais simplement pour les faire obéir.]

This Qur'anic injunction has been reiterated in this century by S. Abul 'Ala Maududi in his book *Huqouq ul-zaujajn* (The Rights of Spouses) which is quoted by Mazhar Khan:

...if a wife does not render unto her husband what is the husband's or does not obey him, he can beat her until she begins to obey him. Maududi further states that an "obdurate" woman upon whom such beatings have no effect ought to be divorced.

The threat of divorce, as we have mentioned, is often a factor that keeps a woman silent and observant of *tâ'ah*. Any threat of physical abuse and economic instability (through divorce) is, according to Fatima Mernissi, a consequence of a constant "fear of nushûz". In the collective psyche of the ummah, it is precisely because of this fear that the man keeps the woman under constant surveillance and control.

58 *Le Saint Coran*, note No.1 of the commentary, 84.
60 Mernissi, *Femininity* 92.
Inclined to subversion, rebellion and disobedience, the woman/potential nāshizah instills fear in man and in the patriarchal community. By committing an act of nushûz, the woman may also be a cause of fitna (فتنة). Fitna as defined by the dictionary is: "temptation, attractiveness, infatuation, civil strife". These definitions are derived from various verses in the Qurʾān referring to the concept of fitna. One commentator explains in his exegesis that the word fitna has a range of meanings from temptation to tumult to discord, sedition and civil war. Fitna in this century has retained its' original meaning of civil strife but can also be interpreted in two other ways as outlined by Fatima Mernissi in Sexe, Idéologie, Islam:

...ce que l'on craint est fitna, c'est-à-dire, le désordre, le chaos. Fitna signifie également une belle femme ... avec l'idée d'une femme fatale.

One interpretation that links the concept of fitna to women may be traced to 'Aisha bint Abi Bakr, one of the wives of the Prophet Muhammed, who, in 656 AD (34 AH) fought in the Battle of the Camel (Yaum al-Jamal). The role of 'Aisha, 

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61 Cowan, ed., 698.


63 Mernissi, Sexe 31.

64 It is stated that 'Aisha bint Abi Bakr rode a camel onto the battlefield where her army fought the son-in-law of Muhammed, 'Ali ibn Abu Talib. 'Aisha and her army lost the battle and this event had a significant impact on the ummah. Yaum al-Jamal marked one of the first instances of female instigated civil strife or dissension caused within the community, creating a definitive division among the Muslims. For details consult: Denise Spellberg, Political Action and Public Example:
rather than being considered that of a woman who was courageous enough to challenge a man, was evaluated as a condemnation of women who challenge established male authority and create fitna. Although 'Aisha herself, given her special status as one of the wives of the prophet, was never associated with the word fitna, Al-Bukhâri quotes a hadîth in which the prophet declared:

Je ne laisserai point après moi de causes de discorde pire pour les hommes que les femmes.65

Al-Bukhâri also states that the prophet said that there is no "fitna" more harmful to man than woman66. Thus, the concept of fitna attributed to women during the time of the prophet, was exemplified by the actions of 'Aisha bint Abi Bakr, and has come to define any female qualities or actions that pose a threat to man, potentially unbalancing the order of the ummah.

Along with being labeled a "femme fatale", who due to her attractiveness is fitna and can create fitna, the female is also awarded with a keen, deceitful, destructive intelligence known as kaïd (كيد). Kaïd is defined as:

(n) ruse, cunning, deception, slyness
(v) to harm by artful machinations,


65 Al-Bukhâri, L'Authentique 231. Although this has often been declared as an opportunistic hadith without an authentic linking to a direct quote by the Prophet, we consider it be psychologically important in the construction of an Islamic community and in the definition of gender identity.

According to Fatima Mernissi, the concept of kaïd is:

un pouvoir de tromper et de vaincre les hommes, non par la force mais la ruse et l'intrigue.68

This concept is outlined in the Qur'ân and is attributed to women in Surah Yusuf (Joseph), where Zulikha, the wife of Yusuf’s master, Al-‘Aziz, tries in vain to trick Yusuf into having illicit sexual relations with her:

Puis quand l’autre vit la tunique déchirée par derrière, il dit: "C’est bien de votre ruse de femme! Enorme vraiment votre ruse à vous autres, femmes! 69

Attributed with negative energy and qualities detrimental to the smooth functioning of the ummah, the woman becomes in the eyes of man and the community:

vouée à la destruction calculée, froide et permanente du système ...70

Having established a distinct order of power within the ummah, Islam, through the concept of bait at-tâ`ah continues a centuries old trend that effectively subjugates and silences women. As a part of this divine hierarchy, the woman lives in fear of both worldly and divine retribution, that is, temporal and eternal suffering, dispensed by man and Allah respectively.

67 Cowan, ed., 849.
68 Mernissi, Sexe 41.
70 Sabbah 90.
To avoid punishment she must be obedient and remain within the limits prescribed by Allah and be watched over and protected by male relatives.

Within the ummah, Allah has granted man ultimate authority over woman, placing her in an inferior economic, social, and moral position. This superior status had been maintained within the institution of marriage and then extended to the ummah. Gerda Lerner states that the extension to the society, of rules established in a family is a factor shared by most patriarchal societies:

> The patriarchal family is the cell out of which the larger body of patriarchal dominance arises.\(^71\)

Within the family unit of the ummah, as we have mentioned, the woman is obedient and avoids any act of nushûz. Extended to the ummah, the negative concepts of fitna and kaïd are applied to the woman. This constant fear of dissent keeps the man active in his continuous subjugation of woman. This is carried out by the establishment and rigid control of socially acceptable behavioral boundaries.

We need to emphasize at this point that we have selected a few concepts among many, and have chosen to approach and discuss them from one particular point of view, that of the construction of the submissive female identity. In the context of certain African societies and, in particular, for an analysis of the literary narratives produced in these societies, the concepts discussed in the preceding pages are an

\(^{71}\) Lerner, *The Creation* 209.
implicit and fundamental base upon which literary narrative spaces, in a reflection of real space, are constructed.

Before an analysis of literary narrative spaces can be carried out, we shall further discuss how these Qur'anic concepts and boundaries of acceptable behavior organize the socio-cultural space of any given Muslim society. This divine spatial organization divides and categorizes to create a definite male-female dichotomy which structures the ummah into specific physical and psychological gender based spaces.
The Qur'ânic revelations, the Hadîths, along with the opinions of Islamic theologians and scholars from different eras, clearly indicate to us that the woman occupies a secondary, subordinate position within an Islamic ideological structure. This inferiority is manifest not only in reference to her spirituality and her relation to Allah, but, more particularly, to her every day social contacts or communications with men.

In this chapter, we shall discuss how certain concepts, such as fitna and nushûz, have assisted men in creating precisely defined boundaries that regulate and limit the movements of women within the spatio-temporal constraints of the ummah. In addition to examining the spatial divisions in the ummah, we consider a discussion on the concept of time in the Islamic consciousness, including ideas such as free will and predestination, essential for an understanding of Muslim ontology. A Muslim ontology or existence is created by the internalization of ideas or concepts of human existence, of birth, life and death, that are unique to an Islamic thought process. How and when one exists on this earth and the essential moral and social values one needs to 'be' a Muslim and to 'exist' socially are defined and explained by Allah in the Qur'ân. A discussion of these defining thought patterns
will enable us to comprehend further and more precisely the structuring of a Muslim society and the composition of the Muslim psyche.

An African Islamic literary corpus that reflects\(^1\) not only socio-cultural factors, but also patterns literary space after realist Islamic space, can only be analyzed extensively after a study of the fundamental principles that bring that space, that is the ummah, into existence has been carried out.

**Spatiality and the Muslim Woman**

In every society or culture there is a specific and distinct ideology that assists in the formation, structuring and functioning of that society. Within the ummah, this ideology or "cadre référentiel"\(^2\) is the Qur’ân and the Sharî'ah, which play an imperative role in the division of the ummah into specific zones or areas. In the process of structuring the society by creating specific boundaries, the sexuality of the female plays an essential role. Women, within such a Muslim society, have a particular social role characteristic of a patriarchal society, that of nurturer and procreator.

Although she is considered a companion of man, her social position is consistently inferior to that of the man. Economically inactivated by the law of nafaqa (Chapter I), she

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is valued as a reproductive entity, whose primary function is that of a bearer of children. Increasing the number of the members of the ummah, that is, the number of believers is an essential function for all members. Within this reproductive context, she is reduced to a sexual being whose primary social and religious duty is child birth and child rearing. Her function as a procreator, her image as a fitna, a sexually active being who can at any time disrupt the smooth functioning of the ummah, as well as, kaïd, her keen destructive intelligence, assist in creating a specific social relationship. This social relationship, based upon gender and the power inequality between the sexes, is structured in such a way that it follows:

la logique de l’opposition et de l’antagonisme,
de la complementarité tensionelle3

This opposition results directly from suspicions inculcated in the male psyche by religious doctrine, which insist on the dangerous potential power of women. This is a fear born of an imagined, conceivable loss of the power which has been granted to the male by divine will. The patriarchal foundations of Islam have bestowed upon the male a social superiority which he constantly exercises. In such a state of distrust, any possibility of the female grasping power, however limited, is a threat to the male control of the ummah. Any loss of control would result in social and spiritual chaos

instigated by the female. As a result of all these anxieties, real or imagined, in the male mind, a gender based dichotomy has been established and internalized by the ummah.

Consequently, the Muslim community becomes, in the words of Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, a bipolar world as immutable as the sexual differences and depending, in paranoiac fear, upon:

La rigoureuse séparation de deux "ordres" le féminin et le masculin.4

What actually occurs in this essential gender based dichotomy is that:

the passive, unstable and undependable female sex is to be confined to her biological functions of bearing and rearing children

whereas the:

active, agressive male is to undertake and perform all the responsibilities and tasks of the world outside5

With these assertions, made on the basis of an atemporal, divine law, supported by theologians, one can create a discourse of the "within" (dedans) and the "without" (dehors)6 in any given Muslim society. One important point, that has to be noted at this juncture, is that this framework, established by the masculine claim to greater spiritual and socio-economic power, has been internalized by the female due to a lack of power on her part. In Le Harem et les cousins Germaine Tillion declares:

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5 Khan, Polygamy 199.
... la femme, comme beaucoup d'esclaves, est souvent complice....

This powerlessness has been perpetuated and maintained due to insufficient, rather non-existent socio-religious institutions which could encourage female empowerment.

What one observes, in this social structuring, is a manifest division of the social space with the male, involved in economic activity, occupying the public sphere, the 'without', and the female confined passively to the domestic sphere, the 'within'. Additionally, Fatima Mernissi states that:

Le monde musulman est minutieusement scindé en deux sous-univers: l'univers des hommes, l'Umma, qui va de pair avec religion et pouvoir, et l'univers des femmes qui est celui de la sexualité et de la famille.

On the other hand, in this 'within'/'without' dichotomy, we can equally recognize the male, existing within, commanding and authoritative at the center of events, actively involved in the functioning of the community, whereas the female is without, marginalized, suppressed, unempowered, living in virtual alienation on the periphery of socio-economic activity.

The public domain within the community of the ummah can be divided into two distinct spaces, the socio-economic and the socio-sacral. Within the socio-economic space, which is

8 Mernissi, Sexe 155.
occupied exclusively by males, there exists a relationship of social camaraderie and fraternity. This is a domain in which all 'brothers in Islam' exist on an egalitarian basis. There is no hierarchization, all exist on a horizontal plane, a plane where the female is not welcome. If she were to enter this male dominated domain, she would be considered an anomaly and a social non-entity.

This sense of fraternity and equality in the socio-economic space is carried into the socio-sacral space, the mosque. It is particularly exemplified on Fridays at the local mosque, when men gather to pray and to discuss religious, social and political issues that effect the smooth functioning of the community. The worshippers in a mosque form a community united in their submission to Allah. Apart from providing a collective social space, the mosque is also a sacred space where every moment of worship redefines and recreates the hierarchical bond between men and the divine entity. It is a space of social reconciliation, empowerment and communication between men and of the spiritual reconciliation between God and believers.

The mosque, a sacred space, intended for all believers has, in reality, become a place of worship for those with access to the public domain, that is, those with socio-economic power. In all mosques, male believers commune together and women, those who may come, are marginalized to a separate section of the mosque, where they sit in silence and listen.
Their non-participation in creating the spiritual path of communion with Allah has been carried to an extreme in countries such as Senegal, where women are generally not permitted to enter mosques.

The sacredness of the mosque can easily be transferred to the prayer rug, which functions as a transportable sacred space. The prayer rug is a piece of the sacred within the profane space. It provides the necessary space to create the link between the worshipped and the worshipper, but does not provide the horizontal communication between believers.

The fact that most women have either been relegated to the periphery in a mosque or to creating their personal sacred space with the use of a prayer rug is quite convenient. By insisting that women remain in the background in a mosque, men can maintain their claim of a closer spiritual relationship with Allah. Furthermore, having no access to a socio-sacral space, women do not have the opportunity to meet, communicate and form a common female link with the spiritual. Without this communication, the possibility of collective female empowerment is greatly reduced if not rendered impossible.

An important concept of this exclusive male community is "the gaze". This is the vigilant eye of the community which constantly watches over the actions, comportment as well as the comings and goings of its members. As the symbolic eyes of Allah are constantly watching over the entire community of believers, the male eye is safeguarding its own space. The
male gaze becomes a representation of the eyes of the divine and protects the ummah, particularly, from unwanted and decidedly disturbing female intrusion:

Le chaos, le désordre peuvent être développés par les femmes, si les hommes n’y prennent pas garde.9

As we have mentioned in Chapter I, the presence of a female in the male space constitutes fitna, that is, a distraction as well as a temptation to the male who is fulfilling his duty to the brotherhood (the community) and to Allah. This fitna may at any time use her deceitful intelligence, kaïd, to attract the male and disrupt the functioning of the ummah. Fatima Mernissi states:

La présence des femmes dans un espace réservé aux hommes est considérée à la fois comme une provocation et une offense.10

Accordingly, all her movements must be controlled and regulated. It is in this regulation, that the eye of the community plays a crucial role. It observes, judges and, if necessary, condemns all actions that are deemed inappropriate. The male ensures that the woman never leaves the home alone and makes certain that she is accompanied, at all times, by a male relative.

The scrutinizing eye of the male relative, as well as, other males in the community claim the necessity of protecting the female. However, the community which constantly feels

10 Mernissi, Sexe 164.
threatened does not consider a male chaperone to be sufficient protection from fitna. In his apprehension, the male believer needs to render any female intrusion as hidden and as unidentifiable as possible. This is done by excluding the woman behind a veil.

Elles sont tenues à respecter des rituels établis, tels que le port du voile, la modestie (c’est-à-dire les épaules rentrées, les yeux baissés, etc.)\textsuperscript{11}

Historically, the veil may be traced not to Islamic doctrine but to pre-Islamic traditions, particularly to the Sassanid\textsuperscript{12} empire, where the veil and the harem were a symbol of male economic success and his ability to accumulate possessions. It developed, exclusively, as an urban phenomenon when the male had acquired enough resources to make the economic participation of the female redundant.

It is originally mentioned in Islamic tradition when the wives of the Prophet were commanded to veil themselves as a protection as well as a sign of their elite status in the ummah:

Ô, le Prophète! Dis à tes épouses, et à tes filles, et aux femmes des croyants, de ramener sur elle leurs grands voiles: elles en seront plus vite reconnues et éviteront d’être offensées ...

\textsuperscript{11} Mernissi, \textit{Sexe} 163.


In this context, the Arabic word used is not hijâb (حجاب) which means screen, partition, veil, seclusion, but jilbâb (جلباب) which is a woman’s gown or cloak. Another Qur’ânic verse defines two forms of the hijâb:

Et dis aux croyantes de baisser leurs regards, de garder leur chasteté, et de ne montrer de leur atouts que ce qui en paraît et qu’elles rabattent leur voile sur leurs poitrines ...

وَقَلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يُغُضَّضَنْ مِن أَبْصَرَهُنَّ وَيَحَفَّظُنَّ فِرُوجَهُنَّ وَلاَ يِبْدِينَ زَينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَلِيُضِرَّنَّ بِخَرَشِهِنَّ عَلَى جُيُوبِهِنَّ ...

In this verse the verb used is not hajaba (-) to veil, but khamara (خمر) which means: to hide, cover, conceal whereas one of the definitions of the fifth verbal form takhammara (تخمار) is ‘to veil the head and face of a woman’. However, the veiling defined in the above verse by khamara constitutes a cover not of the face or head but of the jaib (جيب), the bosom or breast. These two types of hijab, one a physical covering of the body and the other a psychological veiling by lowering the gaze, were modified under the influence of other civilizations and interpreted according to the social trends of different time periods. They finally became entrenched as an important Islamic doctrine and moral principle. The veil as it is worn by women today:

evolved gradually during the first three centuries of early Islam. It was finally established during the tenth (10th)

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century AD. [4th AH] sanctioned by the dominant theologians [of that era].

The veil, in a public space, functions as a boundary or a frontier that is necessary for maintaining a complete division of the sexes. It is a way of preventing any form of communication between two opposing forces, one male, the other female. The veil, among other things, symbolizes the respect and obedience of the female to the laws of the ummah, and her subordination to the male who dominates the public sphere.

In addition to the concrete veiling of one or several parts of the female body with a piece of cloth, there is a subtler form of veiling that also takes place. This veiling is part of the social conditioning of the female which begins in childhood. It constitutes not only the lowering or veiling of the eyes that has already been mentioned but also a veiling of the female gait and voice. This lowering of the eyes is enjoined for both sexes to protect against immoral behavior. Maududi states that:

> enjoying the beauty and decoration of other women by men and women making other men the object of their eyes is liable to lead to evil results.

To avoid becoming a fitna, the female has internalized the expression of a certain type of body language within the public space. She covers her body and lowers her eyes to avoid attracting attention. Additionally, she is required to walk

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15 Khan, *Polygamy* 17.

softly often with hunched shoulders, speak softly so as not to be heard and to make herself as unobtrusive and as asexual as possible.

Whether she is covered by a piece of cloth or by a psychological veil which constrains her movements, the female carries her private space with her. The boundaries of this private space whether visible or invisible maintain the sexual segregation of the ummah. In a manner similar to the rolled up prayer rug which can create a sacred space within any profane space, the physically and/or psychologically veiled woman creates a female domain within the male social space.

The unveiled woman, one who is unveiled in both the physical and the symbolic sense is considered to be immoral. Wearing clothes that may reveal the shape of her body, that is expose her sexual attributes in public would be defined as fitna. Al-Bukhāri states:

... combien de femmes bien habillées en ce monde seront nues au Jour de la Résurrection.

The importance of this Day, for the believer, will become apparent when we discuss the concept of time in the ummah.

The veiled woman, akin to a shadow, is an undefined form in a long, flowing haïk or other from of veil. She hides her

17 Maududi in Purdah 189, quotes a hadith recorded by Al-Tirmizi which states: “a woman who mixes freely with other people and shows off her decorations is without light and virtue”.


19 There are many forms of the veil, ranging from a simple scarf that covers the head to a robe that covers from head to foot and has a mesh
body and often also her face, thus reducing the threat of temptation that is felt by the male in her presence. Many women who wear the veil discover that it provides a degree of anonymity which is socially effective. Veiled they can move about in the male domain without recognition, permitting them, moreover, to participate, even at a very superficial level, in the socio-economic sphere of the community. However, the veil which supposedly functions as a deterrent to fitna by hiding the female, produces a distinct frame of mind in the male psyche. In many Muslim societies the wearing of the veil connotes a paradoxical meaning:

le voile signifie la négation de la femme sur la scène sociale, il consacre son règne sur la scène du fantasme.²⁰

This indicates to us that the male always considers the woman a fitna. If she is veiled, then her hidden body becomes a space upon which the male constructs his unfulfilled fantasies. She becomes a mysterious, unreachable being who is someone else's property. Her anonymity, supposedly a protection for the male, functions instead as the instigator of desire, disrupting male equilibrium.

In this world, dominated by men, the female is a non-entity, a "non-être"²¹ who does not exist except as a phantom, through which the woman may see. The haïk, commonly worn in North Africa, covers the entire body leaving only one eye uncovered.


²¹ Bachelard, La poétique 191. The terminology of "être" and "non-être" is used by Bachelard in his study of "La dialectique du dehors et du dedans," 191-207.
a shadow passing through hostile territory. Within the public space, male ontology is defined by fraternity whereas female ontology is negated. She is not defined as a believer, a member of the community but as an interference and an invader of male space. Fatima Mernissi, who has carried out an extensive analysis of this subject, claims:

Une femme est toujours une intruse dans un espace appartenant aux hommes puis- qu'elle est un adversaire par définition.22

The veil is worn only when a woman leaves the home, usually for some specific purpose. Customarily, she remains within the domestic sphere, which is her domain of existence. The boundaries of the home, the encircling walls, which often hide the domestic sphere have been referred to as a veil of concrete protecting the woman from the masculin realm:

La maison... ne sera plus qu'un voile de pierre renfermant le voile de coton ou de laine...23

This world 'within' is defined as: "l'univers féminin, le monde du secret, l'espace clos...24. The female domain, a hidden world of shadows, is reflected in the somber presence of the veiled female in the male domain.

As discussed earlier, the public sphere is dominated by a sense of community and paternity. This is not so for the domestic domain, where there exists an established, specific

22 Mernissi, Sexe 165.
23 Bouhdiba, La sexualité 50.
24 Allami, Voilées 73.
hierarchy and distribution of power. The patriarchal order within the home is indicated by the dominance of the most senior male member of the family. Usually the father, he can be referred to as a “Père Idéalisé”:

féroce, jaloux, tout-puissant, dont l’empire sur les autres ... est illimité, protecteur en échange d’une soumission totale, maître absolu des lois dont il est toute l’origine.25

His authority as regulator and controller is similar to that of Allah; “L’image du père est proche de celle de Dieu”26. Not unlike administrators, the men pass in and out of the doors of the home at their leisure, moving freely between the public and domestic domains. The functioning of the home is the duty of women, with the men interfering only when it becomes necessary to assert their control or to satisfy their needs:

... la maison reste un lieu typiquement féminin dans lequel l’homme séjourne très peu et "n’y entre que pour en sortir", et après avoir accompli ses fonctions biologiques, telles que se restaurer, dormir, procréer 27

This male-female hierarchy which is characteristic of the domestic sphere is also transported into the public sphere by the veiled woman. By carrying the domestic space with her, the woman is indicating her submission to the social hierarchy within which she is unequal to a male. In this manner, both

26 Lacoste-Dujardin, Des mères 118.
27 Lacoste-Dujardin, Des mères 74.
'within' and 'without', the social domination of men is preserved.

When the men are absent from the domestic space, women enjoy a relative autonomy, although they continue submitting to the rules instituted by men. Nonetheless, amongst the women there also exists a distinct hierarchy. At the highest level of this female hierarchy is the mother/mother-in-law, who by virtue of having an adult married son gains considerable power. We must bear in mind that when speaking of the traditional Muslim family unit, we are referring to a patriarchal, virilocal\(^{28}\) extended family system. In this type of residence, the new bride must obey her mother-in-law:

La mère est ... investie d'un pouvoir de surveillance de la conduite de sa bru qui lui est ainsi subordonnée.\(^{29}\)

Performing all the daily chores, her role is, basically, that of a servant to the mother, whose control also includes the keys to the pantry: "le symbole de ce pouvoir est la clé de ... la réserve où se trouve ... les provisions"\(^{30}\). These keys grant the mother-in-law a power that is not easily relinquished. The next level of power rests with the wife who is a mother, that is the woman who has proved that she can contribute to the ummah, by increasing its numbers:

\(^{28}\) The Dictionary of Concepts in Cultural Anthropology, ed. R. Winthrop (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991) 116, defines virilocal as a residence where [the couple] reside with the husband's kin. Virilocal is derived from the Latin root 'vir' which means man or husband.

\(^{29}\) Lacoste-Dujardin, Des mères 123.

\(^{30}\) Mernissi, Sexe 144. See also Lacoste-Dujardin, Des mères 123.
... avoir des enfants est une obligation sociale... 31

She is particularly valued as a mother of sons; her status as a wife is assured with each successive male birth, while the fear of repudiation decreases.

It must not be forgotten that between these two broad categories there are sub-categories which include among others, the divorced woman, the childless woman, the single woman, and the mother of daughters. All these women exist at different levels of powerlessness and social recognition by the male brotherhood. In our analysis of Islamic African narratives, we will discuss the representation of various sub-categories of female marginalization, and its corresponding levels of being and non-being. On one of the lowest levels of this hierarchy exists the young unmarried woman, the daughter, who will enter this circle of power and control upon her marriage. This ordering of the female space is carefully maintained by the mother/mother-in-law figure who functions as the male representative. The female child internalizes the power structure by observing the gendered spatial dynamics within the domestic space. This conditioning which begins in childhood is essential for the perpetuation of the social organization.

This system is preserved by women at all levels of the female hierarchy in obedience of men and the divine law. Any transgression would be considered disrespectful to Allah. The

woman would damage not only her reputation but also that of her family:

La maison ... citadine... [est] une "sacralisation de l'espace qui la protège et dont l'inviolabilité se confond avec l'honneur: la horma."32

Horma, or more correctly hurma (حَرَمْ), derived from the Arabic root HRM, is defined as: "inviolable, taboo, sacred, deference, esteem, respect" its plural form huram (حَرَام) being defined as 'woman, lady, wife; additionally the derived form harîm (حَرِيم) means "female members of the family, woman, wife, or inviolable space"33. The preservation of the male/female spatial boundaries is intrinsically linked to the moral concepts of respect and honor defined not only by hurma but also by 'ird (عرض) and 'izz (عزّة):

'ird - honor, good repute, dignity34
'izz - strength, honor, glory35

The implication is that if one possesses the moral qualities of honor and respect then one will safeguard the sacredness of the spatial structure. The female who possesses honor assists the male in defining her own existence as well as in maintaining the social order. By becoming the repository of honor and respect, the female ensures the desired gender separation and allays the male fear of fitna. This moral elevation is

32 Tillion, Le Harem 140.
33 Cowan, ed., 171-172.
35 Cowan, ed., root 'izz, 609.
achieved by obeying the established laws and by behaving in the requisite manner. Male and, more specifically, familial honor is based upon:

la conduite morale des femmes de la famille, chasteté prémaritale..., fidelité de l’épouse, continence de la veuve ou la divorcée.36

The physical spatialization of the ummah into two separate and gender distinct domains has been transformed into the psychological concept of hurma in order to restrain the woman within her prescribed boundaries. The woman is "être", she exists in the domestic domain where her functions are clearly defined, gaining or losing power depending on her relationship to men. Moreover, by her behavior, within and without, but more particularly in the public sphere, she can maintain or lose the family honor and affect her own ontology.

The gendered, socialized human as well as the human - divine relationships in a defined space constitute an interwoven system of hierarchical and equality based relationships. As indicated in the simple diagrams below, four types of spaces can be distinguished within the socio-cultural space of the ummah. Within each of these spaces members of the community live in a specific state of existence defined by a social relationship. It is to be noted that in all the social spaces, the female is subordinate to the male, whereas as in the purely sacred space, which can be characterized as a spiritual/psychological state of being, both the male and

36 Minces, La femme 25.
female believers are equal in their subordination to the divine being:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PUBLIC</th>
<th>DOMESTIC</th>
<th>SACRO-SOCIAL</th>
<th>SACRED</th>
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<td>Allah</td>
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<td>(woman)</td>
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**Figure 2.1 - Social Space and Hierarchical Relationships**

**Time and Muslim ontology**

The concept of time plays an important role within the *ummah*. The Qur'ânic revelations and their immutability over time and space is a concept that is sacred to all Muslims. The word of Allah, as revealed to Muhammed, is fixed and hence the laws written down will never change. This idea, of an unchangeable eternal law, has a profound effect on what it means to obey and submit to the will of Allah, as well as the consequences of any transgressions, major or minor.

In this section we will discuss time reckoning, a significant aspect of any community, along with the concept of finite and infinite time in an Islamic context. Within an Islamic community, the different concepts of time accomplish a significantly fundamental role in the functioning of the *ummah*. Furthermore, the Islamic concepts of time are critical in deciding everyday actions and in determining the social being of each member of the group. Time has been defined as a
relative concept, its perception and significance differing from society to society. One can declare that time is a:

cultural and religious concept; its meaning generated with specific contexts\(^{37}\)

With reference to an Islamic socio-cultural structure, we can state that Muslims exist in a particular frame of time reckoning that is dependent on Islamic ideology.

The Muslim conception of history and historical periods in time is divided up into specific eras dominated by different prophets of Allah and their respective revelations. In this context, the era of Muhammed and The Word revealed to him is significantly more important than all the others. Hence, the time preceding the first Qur’ânic revelation, the Jâhilîya, is simply designated as ‘the period of ignorance’\(^{38}\). It is vaguely referred to by Muslims as a period, without any specific beginning, of paganism and widespread debauchery that came to an end with Islam. Consequently, Islamic time, although existing from the creation of the world as outlined in the Qur’ân, takes on a specificity the moment Muhammed is commanded by Allah:

Lis, au nom de ton Seigneur qui a créé,
qui a créé l’homme d’une adhérence.
Lis! Ton Seigneur est le Très Noble


\(^{38}\) Cowan, ed., 144. The term jâhilîya (جاهلية) defining "a state of ignorance or pre-Islamic paganism" is a derived form of the verb jahila (جل) which means: to be ignorant, irrational, foolish, to behave foolishly.
The next division or definition of time occurred when the Prophet fled, with his few followers, from Mecca to Medina. This migration, known as the Hijra, marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar which is based upon the phases of the Moon. This can be referred to as a division of time by natural events\textsuperscript{40}, in this instance, the movement of heavenly bodies. We shall see, in our study of African narratives, that certain Islamic lunar months take on a special significance as a backdrop to the problems of specific characters. In particular, Ramadan, the month of prayer, fasting and atonement carries great symbolic weight. The ummah functions according to these Islamic months and corresponding religious holidays.

Daily life within the ummah is also divided into distinctive social intervals. The day is regulated by ritual interventions of prayer. Every believer is obligated to perform five daily prayers "calibrated to the position of the sun"\textsuperscript{41}. These prayers function as a break in the profane

\textsuperscript{39} Le Saint Coran, Surah al-`alaq (XCVI): 1. These are the first verses that were revealed to Muhammed in 610 AD, and began his mission on earth as the prophet of Allah.


existence of the ummah. The adân (اذان) or prayer call, cuts through space, reminding the world of the presence of Allah, bringing to a standstill all economic activity. Upon hearing the adân, each and every member of the ummah is supposed to stop what they are doing to perform the ritual prayer.

Every prayer time becomes a moment of fraternity and communion with Allah. It functions as a reminder to Muslims that the divine entity is ever present, and that submission to his will is necessary. The daily prayers are a break in the flow of horizontal, profane space and time and represents a brief period of vertical, sacred communion with the eternal. This is a state of separation, of sacralization, that gives meaning and definition to the life of the believer.

Furthermore, the Ka’aba, towards which all prayers are directed is the spiritual center of the Muslim world. The Ka’aba as a concrete sacred space symbolizes:

le point cardinal de l’ensemble du territoire sacré aussi bien que le point de rencontre entre le Ciel, la Terre et l’Enfer.

Thus, the obligatory pilgrimage to the city of Mecca becomes a religious/mythical voyage to the essence of the sacred on earth. The voyage along with the accompanying rituals are horizontal movements in space, which result in moral elevation

\[ \text{maghreb, at sunset and 'asha , at supper time or late at night, see Eickelman, 44.} \]


to a symbolic higher sacred ground. Having performed the rites of Hajj, the pilgrim returns home with the label “Hadji” or “Hadja”, a title of honor and respect carrying with it the social obligation of principled moral conduct.

Other moments of the day are often interrupted with expressions thanking Allah or praising him. A compliment will be given by saying “mashallah” - “praise be to Allah”; when thanking someone one says “jazakallah” - “may Allah repay or bless you”, and so on. These expressions serve to bring the eternal into the temporal; small deeds done in time, expressed at a profane moment, are reflections of the infinite presence and influence of Allah.

In speaking of the sacred and the profane, the infinite and the finite, there are two fundamental expressions of time in Islam, which require discussion. These are the concepts of al-dahr (الدهر) and al-zamân (الزمان). Dahr, derived form the root DHR, expressing the duration and immutability of time as well as the concept of inevitability, is defined as:

- lifetime
- epoch
- fate
- long time
- age
- destiny
- eternity

Furthermore, the continuity or infinity of dahr and its fatality are emphasized by the expressions:

- dhara al-dâhirîn (دهر الداهرين): for all eternity
- ilâ âkhiri al-dahr (الآخرالدهر): forever and ever
- banât al-dahr (بنات الدهر): blows of fate,

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44 Cowan, ed., 295
misfortune
surūf al-dahr (صرف الدهر): vicissitudes of fate, changes of fortune\(^{45}\)

Zamān, based on ZMN, also implies duration and determination: “time, duration, fortune, fate, destiny”\(^{46}\). However the following derived forms emphasize the restrictions of al-zamān:

\[
\text{zamāni (زمانی)} / \text{zamâni (زمانی)}
\]

temporal, worldly, earthly, secular passing, transient, transitory,

\[
\text{zamāniya (زمانیة)} / \text{zamânīya (زمانیة)}
\]

period of time, given time \(^{47}\)

In Islamic ideology, al-dahr and al-zamān are parallel concepts, complementary and antithetical at the same time. To al-dahr belongs the realm of Allah, the eternal; al-dahr is infinite time, it has neither beginning nor end. In fact, it can be said that Allah is al-dahr. Abu Hurayrah\(^{48}\), a companion of the Prophet, has stated:

The prophet said: 'So Saith God: A human being injures Me when he curses fate (or blames time, al-dahr), for I am [time] (al dahr) - all things are in my hand...\(^{49}\)

The Qur'ānic revelations also belong to al-dahr. As the word of Allah they are “une retrouvaille avec l'Être et avec

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\(^{45}\) Cowan, ed., 295.

\(^{46}\) Cowan, ed., 382.

\(^{47}\) Cowan, ed., 382.

\(^{48}\) Abu Hurayrah (d. 58 A.H./678 A.D.) transmitted a great number of hadiths after the death of the Prophet. He is the source of an estimated 3,500 Hadiths. For more details see The Encyclopedia of Islam 1:93-94.

l’énérnité". Upon opening the Qur’ân, not only does the reader go back in time to the era of Muhammed, but they also create a link in the present, in al-zamân, with the sacred and the infinite, al-dahr. The link between these two time concepts is the Qur’ân and all the laws that have been derived from Qur’ânic injunctions. Additionally, the Qur’ân is the guide that can assist the believer in progressing from the finite to the infinite.

This movement from the temporal to the atemporal is the desire to achieve the sacred, the infinite, which is the main purpose of the Muslim on earth. The fulfillment of this desire, which is the fundamental mission of the believer, includes the construction and perpetuation of the ummah and submission to the dictates of Islam. This, of course, implies that the structure of the ummah and its gender based spatialization must not be modified or changed. This immutability originates in the acceptance of the will of Allah. It is He who creates at will and who defines the limits of existence of every being on earth.

If al-zamân is the concrete present, the future, in the Muslim perception of time, is a more vague concept, usually represented by saying ‘what is written will be done’. The Arabic word used to define this idea of an uncertain future is maktûb (مكتوب), derived from the root KTB (كتب): to write.

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50 Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, Culture et Société (Tunis: Université de Tunis, 1978) 205.
Maktûb is defined in the dictionary as: "written down, fated, foreordained, destined". The author or kâtib of this destiny is the one who has also written the ây al-dhikr al-hakîm (آي الذكر الحكيم) or the verses of the Qur'ân. The concept of Allah as the author of the divine and perfect word as well as the writer of destiny is significant not only for the finite and infinite existence of the believer, but also for authors, profane writing, and the production of literature within an Islamic community.

If maktûb is a universal term, then everything that has, is or will come to pass was written in the indivisible time, al-dahr. The past is already defined by the occurrence of spiritually and culturally significant events, and the present is a time that the ummah can ascertain. However, the temporality falling into the realm of the future is out of reach of human conception. As a result, the term maktûb is an attempt at giving certainty by stating that the will of Allah will always be done. Since everything belongs to the divine being, who has ultimate control over the universe, then the future must belong to Him as well:

A Allah appartient la vie future et la vie d'ici bas.

فلله الآخرة والأولى

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51 Cowan, ed., 813.

52 Derived form âyah (آية), this can be literally defined as 'signs of the wise narrative'. See Cowan, ed., 36.

A prosaic expression used daily is "inshallah" (انشالله) - "if it is the will of Allah" which defines the awareness that most Muslims have of the overwhelming control of the divine entity on their mundane existence. Any discussion of events in the future, or of decisions to be made, is followed by this expression, which implies that all Muslims are subject to His will. The outcome of choices that need to be made in the future are unknown and

in sha allah is a double promise, both pledging and at the same time, withdrawing its commitments.54

The author of The Indices of Fate, continues by stating that:

the idiom of in sha allah serves as an ontological critique to every endeavour, whether individual or collective.55

Within Islamic tradition, as indicated by certain Qur’ânic verses, there is a mixture of free will and predestination. Allah, omnipresent and omniscient, has created the universe and humans. He can create or destroy at will, hence the 'being' or 'non being' of any individual is in His power. However, upon entering al-zamân, the individual believer has choices. With the individual having been promised accountability for every decision taken before leaving earthly time and space, these choices are intrinsically linked to al-dâhr.

It is the juncture of leaving al-zamân and entering al-dâhr which is critical for the Muslim psyche and which keeps a

54 Joseph, The Indices of Fate 157.

55 Joseph, The Indices of Fate 158.
believer from transgressing the hudud allahi (حدود الله). This point is al-sa`ah (الساعة), “The Hour”, whose knowledge belongs to Allah alone:

This Hour, which is supposed to be nothing but a brief moment, links every believer with eternity. It is this Hour which brings al-zamân to an end:

It is at this moment, when all comes to an end, that the believer will be judged. Based upon the choices the Muslim has made in earthly, profane time, in al-zamân, there is a promise of infinite pleasure or infinite punishment. Every action, every decision made by an individual is recorded:

56 Le Saint Coran, Surah al-nahl (XVI):77. See also Surah al-jâthiya (XLV):27.


This moment in time, al-sa'ah, repudiates the reality of death by guaranteeing eternal life. The quality of this eternal life is dependent on a finite existence in a finite world. The purpose of being on earth, of existing in a temporal world, is a test, which, if completed satisfactorily, will lead the righteous believers to absolute space and time, to Heaven, "où ils demeureront éternellement"\textsuperscript{59}, and where believers will live in peace and pleasure:

Ils seront accoudés sur les tapis doublés de brocart, et les fruits des deux Jardins seront à leur portée ... Ils y trouveront [les houris] aux regards chastes, qu'avant eux aucun homme ... n'aura déflorées.

متكيين على فرش بطنينها من إستبرق وجن الجنين دان ... فيهن قصرت الطرف لم يطمثهن إن قبزهن ولا جان\textsuperscript{60}

On the other hand, those who have sinned and disobeyed, they are promised eternal damnation and punishment without end.

The Islamic concept of Hell is akin to a great furnace:

Ils seront au milieu d'un souffle brûlant, et d'une eau bouillante, à l'ombre d'une fumée noire ni fraîche ni douce.

في سموم وحميم وظل من حموم لا بارد ولا كريم\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Le Saint Coran}, Surah al- mujâdalah (LVIII):22.

\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Le Saint Coran}, Surah al-rahman (LV):54, 56. See also LII:17-22; LV:70-74; LVI:22-24. There has been much discussion about the concept of Heaven in Islam and the "delights" offered to believers. Most Qur'ânic verses dealing with this subject promise a beautiful garden inhabited by houris, females who are forever virgin and beautiful. Fatna Aït Sabbah in \textit{La femme dans l'inconscient musulman} has discussed this contentious issue in detail and argues that descriptions of Muslim paradise cater to the male mentality.

\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Le Saint Coran}, Surah al-wâqi' a (LVI):42-44. The many images of Hell in the Qur'ân are meant as a warning to those who desire to modify the status quo of al-zamân. See also: LV:43-45; LVI:92-94; LVII:13, 19; LVIII:3-4.
This absolute space of Hell also belongs to al-dahr, where transgressors will be:

... dans le Feu pour y demeurer éternellement...  
... في النّار خالدين فيها... 62

The concept of time in Islam is however not limited to the two time concepts we have discussed. Time intervals within these time concepts are of interest in understanding the notion of community as well as the existence of the individual. While the definite al-sa'ah is defined as The Hour of Resurrection, the indefinite sa'ah designates a short space of time or an hour. Therefore, sa'ah can be used to designate both a specific moment in al-dahr, and a indiscriminate time interval in al-zamân. Furthermore, in al-zamân one can use the words waqt and lamh along with derived expressions to define a moment in time:

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{waqt-} & \text{lamh-} \\
\text{period of time} & \text{glance} \\
\text{moment} & \text{moment} \\
\text{instant} & \text{instant} \\
\text{waqtî-} & \text{lamh al-basar-} \\
\text{temporal} & \text{glance of an eye} \\
\text{passing} & \\
\text{temporary} & 63
\end{array}
\]

While al-dahr defines infinite time as well as Allah, the state or condition of being eternal is defined by the verb khalada (خلد) which is derived from the root KhLD. This verb, often used in Qur’ânic terminology, signifying: “to remain forever,


63 Cowan, ed., WQT 1087; LMH 878.
to be eternal, to be immortal"\textsuperscript{64}, has the following derivatives:

- \textit{khulûd} (خلد): infinite duration, endless time, eternity, perpetuity
- \textit{dâr al-khulûd} (دار الخلود): Paradise, the hereafter
- \textit{khulûd} (خلود): eternity, eternal life, immortality.

One additional term, which in our opinion, is similar to \textit{sa'ah} in that it can define different intervals in \textit{al-zamân} as well as signifying a moment in which a believer attempts to transcend to \textit{al-dahr} is \textit{`asr} (عصر):

- \textit{`asr} - era, time, period, epoch, afternoon, afternoon prayer
- \textit{al-`asr al-hâdhr} (العصر الحاضر) - the present (time), our time\textsuperscript{65}

Although representing moments in \textit{al-zamân}, \textit{`asr}, the afternoon prayer, becomes the vertical time link, enabling the believer to communicate with the divine. In this respect, \textit{`asr} becomes an aspect of \textit{al-dahr}, a moment of reconciliation that is infinite in its repetition, every afternoon of every day.

The different concepts of time reckoning in Islam become further complicated for the human mind and imagination when one considers the human versus the divine notions of ‘day’. While the human perception of one day is limited to twenty-four hours the \textit{Qur’ân} mentions ‘les jours d’Allah’ (أيام الله) as being of two different durations:

\textsuperscript{64} Cowan, ed., 253.
\textsuperscript{65} Cowan, ed., 616.
... un jour auprès de ton Seigneur, équivaut à mille ans de ce que vous comptez.

... وإن يوما عندريك كألف سنة مما تعدون

... un jour dont la durée est de cinquante mille ans.

... يوم كان مقداره خمسين ألف سنة

This complexity of time in Islamic ideology is an indication of the nature of the concepts of al dahr and al zamân, which are two distinct, oppositional but constantly overlapping notions in the consciousness of an Islamized social existence. The various time concepts we have discussed are essential in the conception of space in an Islamic context. Eternal and temporal time are effective in creating as well as maintaining the eternal space of Heaven and Hell and the temporal space of human perception. The following figures attempt to demonstrate these interwoven concepts in which sacred space is essential in generating the connections between various aspects of time:

66 Le Saint Coran, Surah al-hajj (XXII):47 and Surah al-ma'ârij (LXX):4. In a comparison of ‘time as we reckon it’ and ‘timeless time’, the exegesis to these verses in the translation by Abdullah Yusuf Ali states respectively that: ‘What we call a thousand years may be nothing more than a day or a minute to Him’, n.2826, 864; ‘... if we measure time as we measure it on the plane of this life, it may take thousands of years. In the spiritual plane it may be just a day or a moment’, n.5678, 1605.
First Hijra

Beginning of calendar =
time reckoning according
to the planets
creation of ummah

Figure 2.2 - Historical Time

al-dahr

lamh in al-dahr

al-zamān

waqtī

Figure 2.3 - al-dahr and al-zamān

Key:

- sacred space created within the temporal to allow access to al-dahr

- communication with al-dahr through adhān and salat

- infinity
The intertwining notions of time in Islam fundamentally influence the spatial structuring of the ummah. The rules that are followed in the construction, along with the division of the ummah are based on rules derived from elements of al-dahr. These are of course, Allah, who is al-dahr as well as the Qur'án which is an eternal concept in al-zamân. The Qur'án as a representation of al-dahr within al-zamân is the ever-lasting and ever-present Truth and the Straight Path.

This concept of 'le droit chemin'\textsuperscript{67} is a critical and fundamental idea in the conception of the ummah. It is the Path that each believer must walk in finite time and space, al-zamân, to reap the pleasures of infinite time and space, al-dahr. The control of time and space, the time of human perception as well as the space of human occupation, by the divine entity is essential in defining human existence and human being. The Qur'án states:

\begin{quote}
Pour chaque communauté il y a un terme. Quand leur terme vient, ils ne peuvent le retarder d'une heure et ils ne peuvent le hâter non plus.
\end{quote}

Within the defined boundaries of time, which limit existence in al-zamân, the human being becomes not unlike a speck of dust fighting for its own space. Being and existence, encompassed by the universal concepts of time and space, become

\textsuperscript{67} \textit{Le Saint Coran}, Surah al-fatiha (I):6.

\textsuperscript{68} \textit{Le Saint Coran}, Surah al-a'raf (VII):34.
a recognition of one’s place within the temporal boundaries of a particular community.

'I am defined by the place I occupy' can be a motto for the expression of political, religious and socio-cultural status in a community. Within the context of the ummah, a male being defines himself by the space and the 'things' within that space which he is able to control. Man becomes a feeble reflection of the divine entity who, being the master of all time and space, has complete control and power.

The female being within this construction has defined boundaries of existence. Her stay in al-zamân is already restricted by divine time control and her spatial existence is bound by the male desire to achieve the khulûd of pleasure in Paradise. These spatial bounds are clearly expressed by an Arabic proverb which states:

La femme n'a que deux demeures, la maison et le tombeau.69

This idea of the temporal and physical restrictions of female being are clearly expressed through the female character in African literary narratives. The reduction of the female into an infinitesimally small and insignificant being is all the more apparent when one considers the importance of the 'writer' and that which is 'written'. If the temporal is a feeble and reduced reflection of the eternal, then temporal literature in any form can only be a cheap imitation of the eternal Word of Allah. In this reduction of the 'real' image,

69 Bourdieu, Esquisse 51.
the female character in literary narrative does indeed become a tiny speck of dust. Ironically, this triviality, which is the female character, is a significant, if not essential, subdued element. Her existence is the nucleus around which male ambitions for achieving *al-dahr* by following the Straight Path revolve. Female submission and restriction are critical treads in the weave which creates literary space in a reflection of the eternal architecture of time and space.
CHAPTER III

FEMALE ONTOLOGY AND LITERARY MARITAL SPACE

As has been discussed in the first two chapters, the social existence and being of the female gender is determined by ideological and traditional value systems which are often rooted in Islamic principles. The socio-cultural factors derived from these principles actively define female being or ontology. More specifically, one can state that female ontology is explained by the social and economic worth that the female has in a particular community. Therefore, the value of her existence is dependent on the communal obligations that she is required to uphold. The question 'who is she' or 'what is she worth' can be answered by examining her social status along with her compliance and submission to the communal social order.

The socio-cultural structures based on Islamic principles which have been discussed in the initial chapters of this work often provide a background for Muslim authors in the production of literary space and discourse. In particular, they are an essential determinant in the creation and definition of the literary Muslim female character.

It is our intention, in this chapter, to examine one particular aspect of this socio-cultural structure, namely the institution of marriage in the context of literary production. Based upon the traditional Islamic discourse previously
discussed, we will analyze the social and psychological spaces created by certain authors and the movement and definition of literary characters within these spaces.

Of particular interest, in this discussion, are female characters who play a distinct social marital role in various narrative discourses. This role centers around the female as a marriageable being whose life and future prospects, regardless of her aspirations, are dependent on the social institution of matrimony and the natural state of motherhood.

Generally, one can state that female ontology has its most positive manifestation, in traditional Islamic ideology, in the role of mother. Mohammed, the prophet of Islam, once declared in what has become a proverbial hadîth that:

Le Paradis est sous les talons (ou aux pieds) des mères.

الجنة تحت أقدام الأمهات

Often quoted within the Muslim community, this hadîth glorifies the role of the woman as mother\(^1\), hence implying that a woman achieves spiritual (and social) fulfillment by giving birth.

In Islamic tradition, women have one precisely defined social role: that of procreation. Often vilified and degraded as a female, she obtains through the act of giving birth to a

\(^1\) Lacoste-Dujardin, Des Mères 110. This quotation is taken from Al-Ghazâlî's Livre de bons usages en matière de mariage, trad. G.H. Bousquet et L. Bercher (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1953).

\(^2\) This hadîth is often quoted to children to teach them obedience to their mothers. It additionally implies that the status of the mother is so elevated that one can obtain "Jannah" - Paradise, if one serves their mother.
healthy child a certain state of honor and feeling of achievement. Pregnancy and the birthing process have often been referred to as the "jihad for women". Jihad, the verbal form of the root JHD (جهاد), among other definitions, also means "to strive, endeavor, fight" whereas the nominal form jihād (جهاد) means 'holy war', as well as, the struggle to perform a religious duty'. It is through this struggle, this jihad, that a woman serves the ummah, and is in turn positively defined. Lacoste-Dujardin explains:

..L'Islam accorde aux femmes enceintes un statut particulier puisque l'opinion générale juge que la grossesse est l'équivalent du jihad.4

By increasing the number of believers or members of the ummah, she performs her religious duty and consequently acquires social respect and honor for herself. In this respect, for a Muslim society and for women, marriage becomes the most essential institution because, it is only within that institution that she may achieve the honor that is given to a mother. Since the title of mother has many benefits for a woman, we shall examine the different aspects of this role through a discussion of various female characters.

Literary narratives often reflect prevalent socio-cultural norms and, it is through the study of certain novels that we will examine the steps or the process leading to the status of motherhood. African Islamic literature vividly depicts the

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3 Cowan, ed., 143.

4 Lacoste-Dujardin, Des mères 84.
path traveled by female characters from their birth to their death, be it symbolic or physical.

The concept of honor for the young unmarried woman or, often, girl, is essential, as are the pre-marriage preparations and the marriage rites. Not only does this imply a symbolic entry into "the world of women" but it also involves a traumatic change in the physical boundaries of female existence along with the psychological limits of female perception. In examining the spatial divisions and physical limitations with respect to the female characters, we must also bear in mind the proverbial statement that a woman has only two spheres of existence: her home and her grave.

It is our intention to study the female character through various life stages, beginning with that of a young daughter who becomes a wife and daughter-in-law to the status of mother and eventual mother-in-law. Together with examining the essence and identity of the female character within specific marital situations, we will also examine the ontological significance of the relationship the female characters have to their spouse, daughters and sons.

We begin this discussion with a study of the main character, Fatiha, in Une femme pour mon fils. Residing in

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5 In many traditional Muslim societies, a female is not considered a 'woman' unless she has had sexual relations, or more precisely, she has been "deflowered" by her husband. One may also find that old women who have never been married may be referred to as "girls". In discussing certain female characters this concept will be clearly highlighted.

the city of Algiers, Fatiha is a young woman, in fact a fifteen year old teenager, who has a traditional arranged marriage to an Algerian migrant worker in France. Unusual for most female characters in the Maghrebian literary corpus we intend to discuss, Fatiha has been permitted by her father to obtain an education. This education, training to become a seamstress, allows her to leave the domestic sphere and pass through the public domain to enter her educational sphere, which is also private and female. All the students are women as is Fatiha’s teacher. According to certain religious interpretations of the required education of women, Fatiha’s training is acceptable to the ummah and may even be encouraged. Maulana Maududi in his interpretation of women’s roles in an Islamic community has declared that “the aim of her education and training should be to prepare her for [domestic] duties”\(^7\). Fatiha recognizes this fact when evaluating her situation and the narrator states:

\[
\ldots \text{ses études} \ldots \text{étaient acceptables pour sa famille et possibles dans son milieu, car cette école technique était bien vue des familles.}
\]

\[\text{(Une femme, 142)}\]

We observe, in this situation, that a particular education is permitted by Fatiha’s father because it is considered non-threatening by the community as a whole. By becoming a seamstress, Fatiha will never physically enter the male economic sphere, but will, as is anticipated, work at home.

\[^7\] Maududi, Purdah 122. Maulana Maududi has explained that these duties are ‘bringing up children, looking after the domestic affairs and making home life sweet, pleasant and peaceful’, 121.
sewing clothes. Whether she becomes a professional seamstress or not, sewing is considered one of the domestic duties that any young women should be capable of doing.

The social control over the training of Fatiha is imperative for her family. By pursuing an "approved" vocation she is maintaining respect for what is demanded of her by society and, as a consequence, is remaining within the socially predetermined limits of acceptable female behavior. In the pursuit of this vocation, Fatiha is behaving in an appropriate manner. Her training is tolerated by society, but it is not considered necessary since, as soon as her marriage is arranged, she is not permitted to finish her studies. Her father claims to her teacher that:

le mariage est chose plus importante pour une femme que l’école (Une femme, 26)

This clearly demonstrates that marriage, which enables a female to fulfill the ultimate role of a woman, that of being a mother, comes before any education which may economically assist the woman and give her with a sense of achievement.

When her family receives the initial marriage proposal, Fatiha is not consulted about her impending marriage. Her father announces the news to her, and she acquiesces without uttering a word. Even by her own family, her desire to continue her education, as well as her emotions are considered negligible. As a daughter, she is obedient to her parents and accepts what they require of her. Her true feelings are expressed to a friend:
This conflict of personal emotions and parental pressure is classically represented by Fatiha, who has to sacrifice her desire for self fulfillment and silently accept familial authority.

The motivation for this marriage is obviously not an individual choice but a communal one. This union is desired by both families, firstly, because one of the principal social responsibilities of Fatiha’s parents is to arrange, for all their daughters, an appropriate marriage at the earliest opportunity and secondly because, the parents of the groom, Hocine:

désirent que Dieu leur donne un petit-fils qui portera le nom de la famille (Une femme, 16-17)

This wish demonstrates that the parental and communal motivations behind a successful marital union are based entirely upon the socio-cultural cum religio-traditional requirements of fecundity and procreation. Individual choice and emotional preferences are considered negligible concepts, possibly destructive to the communal family structure.

Once the marriage is arranged by parental consent, the wedding preparations begin. One of the striking features of the preparations that the bride, Fatiha, is subject to, is a cleansing ritual which involves the removal of all undesired body hair. The word undesired requires some discussion in the
context of 'who considers this hair undesirable and for what reasons'. Obviously, it is Fatiha's mother who demands the removal, however, one needs to question whether it is a particular male requirement that is being followed or a desire to follow a socially prescribed concept (of various origins) of female beauty, or a combination of both. In either case, one can state that 'épilation' of female body hair, which can be performed by shaving, using depilatory creams or the painful process of waxing, serves two distinct purposes. The removal of specific body hair is, firstly, a component of a ritual cleansing or purification process, and secondly, a transformation of the body for the sole objective of seduction.

The female body, as the primary focus of a socialization process, has to conform to socio-cultural specifications of 'how a female body is supposed to be'. Ignoring the natural tendency of most human bodies to have hair, the female body to

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8 One can possibly question if female hair removal as a means to become 'more feminine' did not gain impetus during the colonial era, during which European women colonists, became a gauge for female beauty. Their lighter skin as well as fine pale body hair becoming the desirable beauty criteria in regions of the world where dark hair predominates and body hair is therefore more visible. This would also explain the obsession of women, in many former European colonies, to lighten their skin. An obvious example being the use of xeusal by Senegalese women to lighten their skin. The theme of xeusal as a form of symbolic and physical transformation is masterfully exploited by Aminata Sow Fall in Le revenant (Dakar: Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1976).


10 Belarbi 11-27.
be considered feminine has to be free of hair. Hair removal then is a factor in differentiating social concepts of male and female, that is males have hair, females do not. A female without body hair is unmanly and therefore feminine. Furthermore, her 'unmanliness' makes her socially attractive and consequently a 'desirable' body for male consumption.

Neither the purification nor the beautification aspects of epilation are evaluated as being elements that contribute to female self-satisfaction. Hair removal for purification is a religious requirement for rapprochement with the divine entity whereas hair removal for beauty is for the pleasure of the male. The female body is objectified, modified and appropriately prepared for the satisfaction of Allah or his representative on earth, man. The process that Fatiha suffers through is based on socially prescribed beauty requirements for a young bride-to-be. Her body is, in a manner of speaking, purged of what is evaluated as 'unfeminine' in an attempt not only to please but to sexually attract and seduce her groom. Fatiha's mother laughingly tells her:

Nous devons avoir la peau comme du satin, ma toute belle, comme une pétale de fleur! Ta peau sera comme du velours de soie pour plaire à ton époux; il sera heureux et toi aussi! (Une femme, 11-12)

As implied by Fatiha's mother, the essential considerations during the wedding preparations are not Fatiha and her wishes, but the satisfaction of the male. The ultimate marital goal of the bride is to be a socially accepted and
desirable feminine object which her husband will want to possess.

During the wedding of Fatiha and Hocine, male and female spaces are clearly defined. The women organize the traditional observances, such as the henna ceremony, whereas the men consolidate the wedding ceremony since the actual wedding contract, “nikah”, takes place between the groom, Hocine, and Amor, Fatiha’s father in the presence of male witnesses. All religious and official authority is part of the male domain. This is in compliance with an essential rule of the Sharî’ah, which states that a female must always be represented by a male blood relative, referred to as the walî (ولی). A walî is not only a legal guardian but is also defined as ‘tutor, master, possessor, owner’, whereas the term walî al-amr (ولی الامر) is ‘the man in charge, ruler or legal guardian’. The obvious implication being that a female always requires a male 'possessor'. Additionally, it can be stated that a female is never considered mature enough to take charge of her own affairs, particularly, in the context of matrimony. Following a hadîth, upon which the Sharî’ah law is based, a woman is not given the right to marry without the consent and the participation of the walî at the official religious ceremony. However, the presence of the bride at her own nikah is often

11 Cowan, ed., 1100.

12 An Al-Bukhâri hadith quoted by A. R. I. Doi in Shari’ah: The Islamic Law 141, states: “The Prophet (S.A.W.) said: Any woman who marries without the permission of her guardian, her marriage would be considered null and void”.
considered redundant if not undesirable. The wali may be her father, or other designated male relative who remains her legal guardian, representing her in all religious matters until the day of her marriage. Hence the last act of the wali is to hand his charge over to the new guardian, the husband.

After the wedding, Fatiha is efficiently removed from the female domain in her own family unit and transplanted into that of her husband’s family. This passage is deeply rooted in patriarchal tradition where Fatiha, becoming the object that is exchanged following an agreement among men, passes from the protection of her father to that of her father-in-law and husband:

Faita entre sous la protection du chef de sa nouvelle famille (Une femme, 31)

The essential concept here is “nouvelle famille”, which implies that her own family, at symbolic and emotional levels has ceased to exist for her. Moreover, it emphasizes that her marriage is not a uniting of two separate individuals to form a couple but is the essential passage of the bride from one family to another, from one domestic space to another. In this respect, one can deduce that for Fatiha, her marriage continues and deepens the process of dis-individualization under the tutelage of male elders.

It is precisely the male elder who also decides when Fatiha will see her husband for the first time by declaring to the women keeping Fatiha company: “il est temps de laisser la place au fils” (Une femme, 32). This command for the women to
leave the nuptial chamber signals the beginning of the most important ceremony for the women and particularly for the mothers. At this juncture, the first meeting, centering around the notions of virginity and honor, takes place between the bride and groom. The only advice given to Fatiha by her mother is:

Fais tout ce que voudra ton mari! Ne lui déplaîs pas, mon ange! Tu vas devenir une femme!...(Une femme, 33)

This motherly advice centers on the notions of male pleasure and displeasure. The distinct implication being that Fatiha may be recalcitrant and displease her husband. Fatiha has an obvious choice, she can be obedient to her husband, which will please every member of the family or she can cause displeasure by a possible expression of what she does or does not want. The label 'mon ange', is an indicator of Fatiha's sexual innocence. In fact one can state that she, like an angel, is an asexual or sexually latent being whose sexuality needs to be awakened. Additionally, her sexual ignorance is equated with incompetence, depriving her of the power to make any decisions or demand any rights on her wedding night. The ability to demand then automatically goes to the male who, it is assumed, is sexually more knowledgeable. This grants the male the power to impose his will, to exercise his sexual will and desires on the ignorant, innocent bride.

Furthermore, this socially declared asexual angel, who is not yet a woman, will, once her body becomes the object of male
pleasure, become a sexual being, a woman. As part of the process of female socialization and definition, this is certainly an attempt to negate the procreative abilities of the female gender. This process of 'becoming a woman by being sexually possessed by a male' is a patriarchal construct of the sexualization of the female: only a man can make a woman.

This first encounter between the newly married couple is, for Fatiha, one of apprehension and anxiety. She is alone a stranger who is now her husband and to whom she has to submit her will and her body, while all the women including Fatiha’s mother wait outside the bedroom door:

Les femmes impatientes, attendent l’accomplissement des rites de défloration (Une femme, 34)

The bedroom is the scene of brutal violence in which Fatiha is raped by her husband, and the blood stained clothing, proving her virginity, is displayed to the women waiting outside the room:

...il lance aux femmes la chemise tachée de sang. Geste ancestral. Offrande du sang?
... Les youyoujs éclatent comme fanfares. Elles brandissent la chemise au-dessus de leurs têtes et se mettent à danser (Une femme, 36)

After this incident, Fatiha’s mother, Houria, declares joyously:

Voyez, ma fille était vierge! Elle ne nous a pas déshonorés! (Une femme, 38)

By verifying a bride’s virginity, the families concerned are upholding a patriarchal system, as well as confirming their
obedience to religious laws. Fatiha’s virginity is not only a family possession, but is:

\[ \text{à la fois une valeur culturelle, religieuse et idéologique. C'est un fait social.} \]

The concern over female virginity emphasizes the common familial ownership of the female body and will. The female body belongs to the family, and it is they who decide when and by whom it can be sexually possessed. Female virginity, without any discussion of what can cause a female not to be a virgin, upholds the honor of the family by proving that she is innocent and has not been ‘possessed’ by any man. Her virginity is also proof that she has not transgressed the social limits governing female behavior. According to Freud, the taboo of virginity is “a manifestation of man’s fear of women.” This, translated into Islamic socio-cultural tradition, is the concept of woman as fitna and the ummah’s fear of a potential unleashing of this fitna. Due to this male fear, the female body is a space that needs to be constantly controlled and restrained by the community. As the essential unit of the community, it is the responsibility of the family cell to observe and restrain the physical movements of the female and to prevent intellectual growth of the female mind.

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14 Lacoste-Dujardin, *Des mères* 72.

Returning to narrative space, Fatiha's body, as dictated by tradition, is then a family possession that must be protected and then passed 'intact' or 'unblemished' to the family of her husband. It is then the responsibility of the husband to provide public proof of her 'purity', and of the continued honor of both families. This protection of virginity and control of the female body is reflected by a North African proverb which states:

La fille, il faut la manier avec beaucoup de précaution, comme l'œuf: s'il se casse, on ne la répare pas.17

This social attitude towards virginity and honor is also reflected in the character of Mi, the mother in Abdelhaq Serhane's Messaouda18, a narrative whose setting is a village in Morocco. Mi is brought up by a grandmother who has only taught her humility and:

la valeur incomparable de l'homme ainsi que la nécessité pour une femme d'être épouse et mère." (Messa, 65)

Mi's grandfather and her prospective husband decide on the marriage and the narrator, Mi's adolescent son, explains in a somewhat sarcastic tone:

Pour ses quartoze ans, grand-père lui avait offert un homme (Messa, 65)

16 For further reading, refer to Fatima Mernissi, Virginité et patriarcat, Lamalif, No.107 (juillet 1979) 25-30.

17 Lacoste-Dujardin, Des mères 72.

Mi's wedding night is similar to that of Fatiha's; it is filled with pain, violence and the threat of dishonor. There is no privacy for the couple and Mi's body and the sexual act are socialized to such an extent that one has the impression that there is a time limit on the initial sexual act and the displaying of the blood stained clothing. As in *Une femme pour mon fils*, the guests waiting outside the nuptial room begin to get impatient and as Mi states

...[ils] avaient commencé à se poser des questions sur ma virginité et sur sa virilité (Messa, 46)

As a consequence of the delay and the impatience of the guests, Mi's body is manipulated and abused by a woman brought in to assist the husband and facilitate the process. Mi tells her son:

[Lalla M'barka] m'avait enduit le sexe avec l'huile d'olive et m'avait écarté les jambes dans la direction du père” (Messa, 46)

Moving south of the Sahara, similar attitudes are reflected in a novel by Ousmane Sembène. In *Xala*, N'Goné, the young bride of a polygynist, El-Hadj Abdou Kader Bèye, is advised by her aunt in the following way on her wedding night: “...sois docile dans les bras de ton mari. Obéis” (*Xala*, 43). The next morning, the woman returns and examines the bed sheets for any concrete sign of N'Goné's virginity:

Yay Bineta, suivie de l'autre femme avec son coq à la main, entra. La Badiène, d'un coup d'œil, inspecta les draps, cherchant

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les traces de sang. (Xala, 44)

We can state that the initial sexual act has a dual purpose; it proves to the community that the female is a virgin and that the male is virile. For the female, the sexual act is one of destruction and degradation, whereas for the male it is an act of masculine prowess and commands respect\textsuperscript{20}. Furthermore, it is a marker that claims the female body as the personal territory of the male performing the sexual act.

As we observe through these female characters, the body of the woman belongs not only to the family but also to the community, she herself has no control over it. It can be given away at the behest of the male members of the family, often for economic reasons, and is manipulated and violated to prove firstly that she has been 'possessed' by no man except her husband, and secondly that by her virginity she has kept the family honor intact. The wedding is essentially an exchange of property, the female body, whose value, which is gauged by sexual purity, is linked to the concept of honor. During the wedding preparations, the marriage ceremony and the rites of the wedding night, the female is compliant and obedient to socio-cultural norms. Treated as an object to be given away, one whose value is dependent on the integrity of one small piece of membrane, no thought or consideration is given to her psychological being, and her desires are considered non-existent.

\textsuperscript{20} Refer to Mernissi, Virginité et patriarcat 26.
The wedding night is one of humiliation and violence and the bedroom, supposedly a "nid" and a "lieu protecteur"\textsuperscript{21} par excellence, becomes, for the woman, a room of fear and physical and psychological torture. The bedroom, instead of being a refuge, is the place where she will be constantly violated and dominated by the one man, who by divine decree is supposed to be her protector and supporter. After the socially accepted violent rites of defloration, the husband, having proved his 'virility' (the case of the male protagonist, El Hadji, in Xala, is completely different) leaves the nuptial chamber. The absence of the husband, a recurrent theme in literary space, is an indication of the extent of the denial or of the non-existence of the couple.

Inasmuch as marriage is a necessary institution that serves the ummah by increasing its members, any emphasis on the couple is counter productive for communal and familial cohesiveness and harmony. Therefore, in marital space, the woman is not defined as an equal partner - one half of the whole - but as an economically non-viable and an inferior and submissive being within the family hierarchy. She may become a viable entity, and a contributing member of the community only if she is capable of producing children.

In the case of Fatiha, the attitude of all members of the family is that Fatiha must adjust to her new family. Her mother states: "il faut qu'elle s'habitue" (Une femme, 40).

This adjustment is essential for the married woman, and involves serving the husband and his family. The narrator precisely describes Fatiha’s condition:

...son mari restait un étranger, un étranger qu’il fallait servir le jour et qui avait, la nuit, tous les droits (Une femme, 58)

Similarly, Mi tells her son:

...Moi, je n’étais bonne qu’à laver, frotter, pleurer, vieillir, faire un enfant chaque année, tuer les poux, vider les pots de chambre, attendre, et puis attendre...(Messa, 53)

In Xala, the first wife of El-Hadji can be defined, in socio-cultural terms, as the ideal wife; she is obedient, patient, submissive, devout:

...elle voulait être une épouse selon les canons de l’Islam: les cinq prières par jour, l’obéissance totale à son mari (Xala, 39)

We can evaluate by studying these three female characters that the married woman is defined by her powerlessness and her obedience to her husband, his family and, as a consequence, to the society as a whole.

An example of the domination of the male, in a family unit, is the character of the father in Driss Chraïbi’s Le passé simple. He is referred to as “Seigneur” (Le passé, 14), signifying his status, not only, as the head of the family but also as the representative of Allah. The father is aware of his status and informs his family: “Notre rôle de père est un rôle de guide” (Le passé, 23). As a guide, the father

demands conformity to his interpretations of religious doctrines and is referred to by his wife as "maître" (Le passé, 43).

The female characters in this study do not venture out of the domestic sphere except under specific conditions. Fatiha is only allowed outside into the masculine public space veiled and accompanied by a male family member. Referring to the veil, her husband Hocine declares:

...maintenant tu es une femme mariée; ...Tu le mettras ou nous ne sortirons pas (Une femme, 73)

The clausturation of the female character ranges from limited, supervised excursions to the outside, as is the case of Fatiha, to the situation of the mother in Le passé simple, described here by her son, the narrator:

Epouse, le Seigneur l’avait enfermée à clef, d’abord. Ensuite l’avait engrossée sept fois, coup sur coup. De sorte que, privée de bonne et allaitant — ou enceinte — la porte ouverte n’avait plus de sens pour elle. Son dernier voyage datait du jour de ses noces. (Le passé, 70)

The married female characters are resigned to remaining in the domestic domain, which is controlled by the male members, in the case of Fatiha, her father-in-law, and in the case of Mi, her husband. This is clearly stated by the father figure in Le Passé Simple: "Pour vous nous sommes la tête, le chef de famille qui pourvoit à vos existences..." (Le passé, 52).

In the literary family domain there are three basic spheres of female existence: the bedroom, the kitchen, and the common living space. Firstly, the common living space is one
in which males and females may spend time together physically but traditional barriers of etiquette prevent free interaction and conversation. These common spaces are also vacated by females when the male members of the family receive visitors. Secondly, the bedroom, as has already been mentioned, is not the intimate space occupied by a couple, but is the place where male and female space and being collide. This is where the husband must exert his power and domination through forced sexual relations. The state of Fatiha’s body and her marital relationship is aptly described by the narrator in this ‘intimate’ space:

...il [le mari] avait eu un grand plaisir du corps, alors que son corps, à elle, avait été blessé, brutalisé. (Une femme, 132)

Lastly, the smooth functioning of the home is the duty of women, and the kitchen is often the main focus of her existence. One of the few instances that the father in Le passé simple addresses the mother is in reference to food:

-- Que nous as-tu préparé ce soir, femme?
-- La soupe et des lentilles, Seigneur.
  J’ai cru bien faire...
-- C’est bien. Sers-nous. (Le passé, 62)

Her role as housekeeper, and her duties in the kitchen are valued and can often be a source of power, as we shall see when we discuss the character of Fatiha’s mother-in-law.

As a result of compliance to traditional norms, the married female character is denied access to the economic sphere dominated by men, her individuality within the family unit is discouraged and equal participation as a member of the
couple is forbidden. Consequently, the only viable spaces that she can occupy is that of “servant” and mother. In service of the family, she is submissive and obedient, and her social status, fixed within the institution of marriage, can be enhanced by one factor - motherhood. For the female character, the emphasis is always placed not on her individual sexual being but rather on her fecundity. Often disillusioned by marriage and a non-existent intimate relationship with the husband, the female character finds satisfaction and accomplishment in this socially acceptable role: “Son rôle de mère compensait quelque peu son rôle d’épouse insatisfaite.” (Messa, 58). The social acceptability of marriage and motherhood are well understood by Mi who expresses her recognition of this fact:

Je savais que mon status social reposait uniquement sur mon mariage et sur le nombre d’enfants que je donnerais; des enfants mâles surtout (Messa, 51)

The primary purpose of Fatiha’s marriage is reproduction, and she is expected to become pregnant soon after her wedding. It is emphasized by family members that she needs to have children to ‘keep’ her husband and, in fact, children become the necessary cohesive element of a marriage when the integrity of the couple is denied. Fatiha’s father-in-law declares to his wife: “Elle saura le retenir; tu verras quand l’enfant va s’annoncer” (Une femme, 83); this is followed by an unfinished, foreboding comment on the importance of producing children: “Elle devrait être enceinte; tu sais, quand une femme ne peut
pas avoir d'enfants..." (Une femme, 83). The father in-law expects his first unborn grandchild to consolidate not only the family but also the couple, and being apparently ignorant of human biology and sex determination, he confidently declares: "son premier petit-enfant ne pouvait être qu'un fils" (Une femme, 163). Not unlike Mi who recognizes the importance of having a male child, Fatiha is forewarned by her adolescent brother-in-law, Allaoua, who states: "...tu as intérêt à avoir un garçon. C'est ce que Père et Mère attendent" (Une femme, 168).

In marital literary space, as often is the case in society itself, motherhood brings certain rights and a basic level of power. The narrator of Une femme pour mon fils comments:

...devenant mère, elle acquiert de nouveaux droits, comme le veut la coutume (Une femme, 116)

Motherhood then becomes the key to female ontological verification. By giving birth all the female characters acquire a certain honor and social status. Having proved their fecundity to the community, and having produced a potential heir to carry on the family name, the female character exists as something other than an obedient servant.

The type of power the female character acquires is somewhat dependent on the sex of the child which is born. To demonstrate this point, we will examine the psychological space in which the literary character of the mother of a female child exists. This will be followed by a discussion of the literary character of the mother of a male child. We begin by examining
Houria, the mother of Fatiha in Une femme pour mon fils.

Houria’s appearances throughout the novel are few and are in connection to her daughter and the family ‘honor’. She is described as being:

...effacée, reservée...affectueuse, douce, peu revendicatrice, très dévouée aux autres ...habituée à écouter l’avis de son mari...

(Une femme, 23)

Her relationship with her daughter revolves around marriage and the honor a daughter must guard. This is the essential link between the mother and daughter. Houria has to bring up her daughter in the socially acceptable manner so as to make Fatiha as marriageable as possible. As we have already mentioned, Houria’s advice to her daughter is to obey her husband. Her happiness depends on the virginity of her daughter which must be preserved at all costs. Before the wedding, when the midwife checks and confirms Fatiha’s intact hymen, Houria:

a les larmes aux yeux et rit de bonheur. Sa fille, sa petite Fatiha est vierge (Une femme, 19)

This happiness continues when the blood stained sheet is displayed on the wedding night. This concept of the daughter preserving the honor of the family is clearly demonstrated when a pregnant Fatiha returns home determined never to go back to her ‘new’ family. Houria’s first reaction is not based upon concern for Fatiha’s condition but upon family honor. She asks: “Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu, tu ne nous a pas déshonorés?” (Une femme, 214).
This type of mother-daughter relationship is also evident in literature south of the Sahara. *Buur Tilleen* by Cheik Aliou Ndao and *Véhi-Ciosane* by Ousmane Sembène have a similar theme, that of a young unmarried daughter becoming pregnant (albeit under very different circumstances because in *Véhi-Ciosane*, the central theme is not just pregnancy but also incest). The character of the mother, in both novels, lives in a world of submissive obedience to their respective husbands. The husband, as we have mentioned, is not only considered the head of the household but also the representative of Allah. Maram, the mother in *Buur Tilleen*, patiently waits for her husband’s return: "... viellir jusqu’au retour de son seigneur, tel est son lot de tous les jours" (*Buur*, 10). Ngoné War Thiandum, the mother in *Véhi-ciosane*, reflecting upon her life and social status has the following thoughts:

Humble, mon Yallah, comme Tu le veux, comme
Tu le désires pour tes sujets. Epouse, mère,
je le suis restée sans rechigner, sans incriminer
les écarts de mon mari; docile à mon maître -
mon maître après toi, Yallah -, mon guide dans
ce monde... (*Véhi*, 30-31)

These two mothers, both locked in their definitions as wife and mother, suffer extreme anguish when they discover that their respective daughters are pregnant. They, who have been obedient to the religious and traditional laws set down by

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society, are perturbed at the thought of their daughters having transgressed the limits of socially permitted behavior.

There is genuine fear and anguish when the mother contemplates informing her husband of their daughter’s condition. Maram says: “Comment vais-je parler de Raki, comment?” (Buur, 20). This fear exists because the space occupied by husband and wife, as we stated earlier, is not one of communication but of dominance and subordination. As the subordinated element of the couple, and with a well defined social role, one of the social requirements of the mother is to educate the daughters of the family in an appropriate way. Aware of this fact, Maram is ready to accept the blame:

Que ton blame retombe sur moi...Quel indice a laissé supposer que Raki pourrait combler mon amour maternel de la sorte? (Buur, 24)

On the other hand, Ngoné War Thiandum is accused by her husband of not adequately fulfilling her maternal duties: “Si tu surveillais mieux ta fille, rien ne serait arrivé...” (Véhi, 47).

Similar to the parental and familial attitude in Une femme pour mon fils, the concern with the daughter’s condition centers not on her well-being but around the concept of honor and marriage. Maram and her husband lament “la honte qui vient de détruire leur réputation” (Buur, 24) and later one realizes that their main concern is social status: “l’honneur au-dessus de tout...” (Buur, 31). Ngoné War Thiandum expresses this loss of honor in a different way; she realises that with her
daughter's pregnancy all her hopes and dreams of witnessing her marriage will not be realized. The narrator describes this feeling of deception:

Elle était atteinte dans son aspiration de mère: rêves perdus! Espoirs déçus! N'avait-elle pas rêvé de conduire sa fille vierge jusqu'au seuil de chez son mari? (Véhi, 46)

It is obvious that the honor of the family is linked with the virginity of the daughter and, similar to that of Fatiha, the marriage involves handing over the daughter-object to the groom. In both instances, the daughters suffer the consequences of their transgressions, leaving the mothers in a state of torment. On the one hand, the mothers submissively accept social responsibility for the improper education of female children, however, on the other hand, knowing they were obedient to the system, i.e. this tragedy should not have befallen them, they become fatalistic. Ngoné War Thiandum justifies her situation by declaring: "- Atté Yallah-la-C'était la volonté de Yallah." (Véhi, 51) whereas, Maram laments the human condition:

Quel est donc notre sort, nous, fils d'Adama Ndiaye25? Ne serions-nous que des petits cailloux balotés dans un tamis par des mains malhabiles? Des graines de sable un jour de tourmente. (Buur, 110)

In Abdoulaye Sadji's Maïmouna26, the principal character is also a young girl, Maïmouna, who secretly frequents a young

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25 This is a reference to human beings as the 'children of Adam'

man and becomes pregnant. As in the other two novels discussed above, maternal suffering is intense and the mother, Yaye Daro Dièye, also laments the role of mothers. The narrator, in a personal interjection, explains:

Dans sa tête fourmillaient je ne sais quelles idées sur le cruel destin des mères...
(Maïmouna, 51)

For the mother, the mother-daughter relationship is one that is filled with fear and anxiety concerning the welfare of her daughter. The link between mother and daughter is one of perpetuating the established socio-cultural values and thereby continuing the existential status-quo of the female. This link is called honor and is dependent on the sexual status of the daughter. If the daughter is a virgin on her wedding night, she fulfills the patriarchal requirements of unsoiled property, and, consequently, honors the family, particularly the mother.

The daughter is not judged as an independent being responsible for her own actions and transgressions, but as an extension of the mother’s being and a product of the mother’s training. One can state that between mother and daughter the in-utero relationship is still intact; if the fetus or the newborn baby is sick, something must be wrong with the mother. Hence, if an unmarried daughter ‘is sick’ the mother must have done something wrong. The mother suffers for the daughter’s actions, and when she (the mother) feels that she has done nothing wrong, despite societal accusations, the only justification for her suffering, in her mind, is an
undiscriminating and cruel destiny, the will of Allah, which imposes itself on all beings and defines their existence.

The only redeeming factor in the suffering that the female characters undergo as brides, wives and mothers of daughters is a male child, a son. It has been quoted above that the character of the mother in Messaouda knows that she is expected to give birth to sons, and the mother-to-be character in Une femme pour mon fils is expected to produce a male offspring. This male offspring is important not only for the ummah, which will have an additional member to police the community’s social spaces and ensure that the established laws are not transgressed, but also for the immediate family which acquires an inheritor of property and of the family name. Furthermore, the arrival of a son is critical to the mother. The son is the key to an elevation of her social status in the family and in the community at large.

Another important aspect of the mother-son relationship is the negation of the couple. Since the husband-wife couple is not socially valued as an entity in itself, it is defined and solidified by male offspring, who ensure the survival and stability of the marriage. This stability is particularly important for the wife who is often confronted with the threat of divorce and polygamy. The mother-son relationship diminishes marital instability, provides respect and ensures that the mother will have a caretaker in her old age (since daughters essentially leave their own family for the one they
marry into). The mother-son pair is the only accepted and encouraged heterosexual relationship and the mother clings to it with intensity. In addition, the adult son enhances the mother's power when he gets married. Since the mother has no power over the men in her own family, her triumph, via her son, is bringing into the family a daughter-in-law whom the mother controls and forces into obedience.

We will begin our study of the literary relationship between mother and son with Driss Chraïbi's *Le passé simple* and *La civilisation, ma mère!*...27. In *Le passé simple*, there is a silent communication that exists between the mother and one of her sons, Driss, who is also the narrator of the novel. The mother looks to him for support and he, understanding his mother's feelings, comments: "je savais ma mère inquiète" (*Le passé*, 70). Reflecting on the female condition within the community and observing his mother in her relationship to the father, he states with bitterness:

Une parmi les créatures de Dieu que le Coran a parquées: "Baisez-les et les rebaisez; par le vagin, c'est plus utile; ensuite ignorez-les jusqu'à la jouissance prochaine." Oui, ma mère était ainsi, faible, soumise, passive. (*Le passé*, 44)

By accusing religion, albeit in a very crude, misinterpreted manner, for the existing condition of his mother, the narrator highlights the influence of religion in establishing social roles. While demonstrating a certain

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sympathy for his mother, he also, consciously, judges her. Not realizing the extent of her helplessness and powerlessness he says:

Je te jugeais faible et malhabile. Mangeant, buvant, dormant, excrétant, coïtant. Respectivement les menus établis par le Seigneur... (Le passé, 131)

Instead of receiving understanding from Driss after the death of her youngest son, whom she now wishes to replace by becoming pregnant: "C'était mon tout-petit, répéta-t-elle... maintenant je voudrais le remplacer." (Le passé, 132), she is condemned. Driss screams at her accusingly: "Coffre à grossesses!" (Le passé, 133). The objectification of the mother as a procreating machine is a judgment also passed by the son-narrator of Messaouda when he declares: "[Mi] était une usine à fabriquer les enfants" (Messa, 26). What neither Driss nor Mi's son understand is that the mother, subject to religious and social traditions, is fulfilling her designated social role. Atavistic in nature, this role is pre-determined and static, its defining characteristics having been conditioned into the female subconscious. She is required by society and her husband to reproduce. Reproduction, i.e. motherhood, is the only role she is familiar with for acquiring respect and forgetting her sorrows.

The mother, however, tolerates these outbursts from her son. Both Mi and Driss' mother realize that their son is the only being with whom they have any communication and to whom they can speak of their misery and suffering. The basis of
this literary mother-son relationship is the in-utero connection between fetus and mother as well as her role as nurturer. In order to gain sympathy from her son for the misery caused by the husband, this nurturing role is emphasized:

- Driss mon fils, toi que j’aime entre tous mes fils, par ce ventre d’où tu es sorti, par les neuf mois durant lesquels ce ventre t’a porté, par ce sein qui t’a nourri, Driss mon fils, trouve-moi un moyen de mort rapide et sûre. Driss mon fils, il est entré comme une catastrophe, il a déambulé dans toutes les pièces, il a trouvé que le ménage n’était pas fait, de la poussière sous les lits, des punaises dans les matelas, les murs trop chauds, le carrelage trop froid, l’air impur, il a injurié mes ancêtres, il m’a injuriée et menacée de me répudier. (Le passé, 32)

Living within the four imprisoning walls of the house, with neither family nor friends, and no opportunity to go out, the mother’s emotional and psychological dependency on her son fills the void created by the fear based submissive relationship with her husband. In Chraïbi’s La civilisation, ma mère!..., the mother-son relationship takes on a novel dimension which is described with humor. Once again, the character of the mother is an illiterate woman who, after being married at the age of thirteen, has never been allowed outside the family home, which is described as “maison-tombeau” (La civil, 39). The youngest son, the narrator states:

Poupée on l’avait étranglée par la loi et dans le devoir. Et l’homme très intelligent qui l’avait épousée en pleine puberté ... l’homme conservé dans la saumure de son époque, dans la morale et dans l’honneur, n’avait fait que appliquer la loi. Religieusement. (La civil, 68)
The mother is physically confined within the home and her emotional and intellectual needs are suppressed. This situation begins to change when the husband brings home a radio. The mother quickly becomes attached to the radio whose functioning she does not clearly understand, and which she refers to as 'Monsieur Kteu', a derivative of the brand name Blaupunkt. This unusual attachment, as explained by her son, fills an emotional void:

Monsieur Kteu devient pour elle l'homme qu'elle avait toujours attendu: le père que elle n'avait jamais connu, le mari qui lui récitait des poèmes d'amour, l'ami qui la conseillait et lui parlait de ce monde extérieur dont elle n'avait nulle connaissance (La civil, 39)

Obviously, it is via a radio station that the mother seeks the essential emotional relationships that have been denied her by a social system that ignores the desires and expectation of females. The radio functions as the substitute male who speaks to the female from a distance, giving out knowledge and information. While replacing the authoritative male voice, its distance allows the mother to speak to it, without the fear of reprimands. Additionally, the radio provides the male voice without the supervisory and ever present male eye or 'gaze'. Hence, the voice emanating from the radio allows the mother to develop a relationship with the absent male without the restrictions imposed by the physical presence of a male. The radio is the starting point on the path of an awareness of her surroundings and a discovery of her own being. The mother is assisted in this discovery by her two sons, who decide to end
their mother’s prisoner-like existence. Speaking of the father and the mother’s conditioning the narrator states:

[le père] L’avait enfermée dans sa maison depuis le jour des noces et jusqu’à cet après-midi-là où nous l’en avions fait sortir. Jamais elle n’en avait franchi le seuil. Jamais elle n’en avait eu l’idée (La civil, 68)

The mother’s reaction to her sons’ intentions is one of fear, fear of her husband and of the unknown world that lies beyond the four walls of her existence:

Mais que va dire votre père?...Non, non, non, je ne peux pas...Retournons vite à la maison ...vous savez bien que je ne suis jamais sortie...(La civil, 66)

The mother-son relationship in this novel is based on complicity and initiation. The father becomes the outsider in a situation where the sons introduce the mother not only to the outside world, but also to her own being. This symbolic rebirth of the mother through her sons will be further discussed in Chapter VII. In these two novels by Chraïbi, the character of the mother is dependent on the son for emotional support. The son is the accomplice and confidante in a hostile home environment which subjugates the mother. It is through the son that the mother gains confidence and is able to achieve self realization. A son not only listens, but also helps the mother survive in an impossible existential situation in which her being is denied.

As stated earlier, the mother-son relationship is also a source of power. This power is clearly evident when an adult son gets married. One of the traditional functions of the
mother is to find an appropriate wife for her adult son, therefore, the greatest honor that a mother receives is the right to choose a wife for her son and arrange the subsequent wedding. Living in a society that encourages sexual segregation, she is the only one who can seek out and examine young women and evaluate their qualities as a prospective bride for her son and as a future 'daughter' of the family. The daughter-in-law, an addition to the female domestic sphere, is one whom the mother-in-law can easily control and of whom she can demand obedience. The daughter-in-law is perceived, above all, as an additional helping hand to assist with domestic chores and not as a partner for the son. The mother actively supports the denial of the husband-wife couple because she perceives her daughter-in-law as a rival for the affection of her son.

The mother/son/daughter-in-law relationship is clearly demonstrated in the appropriately titled *Une femme pour mon fils*. Fatiha’s mother-in-law, Aïcha, is described as:

> énergique, autoritaire et fière de la puissance et de l’autorité qu’on lui a accordées dans les limites qui sont celles de l’univers des femmes. (*Une femme*, 23)

This description stands in stark contrast to that of Fatiha’s mother who is described as being self-effacing (*Une femme*, 30). Aïcha’s control of the house is symbolized by the keys of the

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28 Refer to Lacoste-Dujardin, *Des mères contre les filles*, for more information on the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship in some Muslim societies.
pantry\textsuperscript{29} which is always locked, and by her surveillance of Fatiha and Yamine (Aïcha's young daughter) who do the household chores:

\textit{Tout... est sous sa garde vigilante... Aïcha est vraiment la grande prêtresse de la grande armoire! Elle en détient les clefs toujours accrochées à sa ceinture. (Une femme, 61)}

Limiting Fatiha's social interactions within the domestic sphere is the strategy used by Aïcha to maintain her power. This is done in two ways; firstly, by preserving the lack of intimacy between the couple and, secondly, by discouraging any friendship between Yamine and Fatiha:

\textit{Aïcha multipliait les interdictions. Elle veillait à ce que sa fille soit le moins souvent possible avec Fatiha... (Une femme, 188)}

The mother-son complicity is evident when Fatiha and Aïcha have some conflicts and Hocine, instead of evaluating the situation in a rational manner condemns Fatiha: "Ma mère a raison, Fatiha, tu as un caractère épouvantable!" (Une femme, 106). In the mother/daughter-in-law conflict for Hocine's affection, it is always Aïcha who 'wins'. After another incident between the two women Hocine shouts at Fatiha:

\textit{Tu ne dois pas manquer de respect à ma mère! Ça, je ne tolérerai jamais, tu entends! (Une femme, 85)}

Apart from the verbal reprimands, Hocine also uses physical violence to control Fatiha while demonstrating support for his mother. In her determination not to lose her son's affection,

\textsuperscript{29} Mernissi in \textit{Sexe, Idéologie, Islam} discusses in detail the social status and condition of the mother-in-law.
the violent and aggressive aspects of the husband/wife relationship are expected and encouraged to a certain extent by Aïcha. The manifestation of physical violence and verbal disputes between husband and wife assist in maintaining Aïcha’s complicity with her son as well as her power over the domestic sphere.

It is important to note that female power within the domestic sphere is not devoid of male influence. The control the mother exercises within a bound space is constantly reinforced by the male members of the family. As the eldest male member, the father permits the mother to have control of the limited domestic sphere. However, whenever that authority is challenged by Fatiha, the mother has to turn to a male member (in this instance her son) for assistance.

Another dimension of the mother/son relationship that needs to be mentioned, is its complex nature colored by incestuous undertones. It has previously been mentioned that the mother-son relationship is the only heterosexual relationship that is encouraged and sustained by the community. With the birth of a son, a mother gains marital stability, and the lack of emotional ties in the husband-wife couple is compensated for in the strong emotional ties that develop in the mother-son relationship. Due to their value as providers of stability, boys spend their formative years in the domestic female sphere, under the protective wing of the mother who nurtures a close and intricate relationship. One of the most
significant experiences for the young son are the visits to the hammam with the mother. Firstly, these regular visits are a symbolic return to the warm and dark uterus and, secondly, they provide exposure to female nudity and are sexually awakening.

The first sexual memories of the son in Messaouda are of visits with Mi to the hammam. The narrator/son marks the passing of his childhood with the closing of the doors of the women’s hammam:

...j’enterrai mon enfance au bout du monde, une vérité faite essentiellement de seins, de sexes, de fesses et de quelques rêves... C’était le sous-sol troublant de mon enfance où j’avais découvert le cantique du sang et du sperme (Messa, 39)

Obsessed with his own sexuality and with Messaouda, a woman who is a sexual object for the men, the narrator-son tries to compare Mi with Messaouda:


Later, commenting on his incestuous fixation, he states, “Mon sexe dormait. Mi ne l’excitait plus; il avait mûri” (Messa, 52).

In Une femme pour mon fils we observe the opposite, that is, Aïcha’s fixation with her youngest son, Ali:

Aïcha assise sous le figuier avec le petit Ali sur ses genoux, l’embrasse et fredonne.
- Mon chéri, mon petit homme. Qui est-ce qui est le petit homme à sa mère?...
- Et à qui il est, ce petit bijou? Ce petit bijou qu’on ne montre pas aux filles?
Elle touche en riant le sexe d’Ali; il se

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30 For a detailed discussion refer to A. Bouhdiba, La Sexualité en Islam.
roule à nouveau sur elle en riant et pleurant. 
(Une femme, 165)

Without delving into psychoanalysis of the ambiguous sexual nature of the mother-son relationship, one can state that the rupture of this relationship is often traumatic for the son and signifies a rejection not of the mother but of her sexual nature. However, this denial of the mother's sexuality will, at a subconscious level, affect all his future heterosexual relationships. This is demonstrated by Mi's son who has been socialized to think of the female in terms of a sexual object, and her body as a space for his sexual desires. From the perspective of the mother, Aïcha, her emphasis on and touching of the genitals of her 'petit homme' is the source of emotional ambiguity for Ali. Furthermore, claiming ownership by stating that she is the only female who can see his genitals creates, at a fundamental level, a rupture (similar to that defined by Buffon) in his sexual attitudes towards women. The mother is the forbidden body who has the right to his genitals, whereas all other women are bodies to be used by his precious organ but who have no rights or claims over it.

In concluding, one can state that in literary marital space the woman is fixed in a double role, both of which are

31 Alya Baffoun, Les Stratégies de reproduction de l'ordre sexual inégalitaire - Analyse de la dyade Mère-Enfant (Fils), Femmes et reproduction en Afrique, ed. Belkis Wolde Giorgis (Dakar:AFARD-AAWORD, 1992) 63. Baffoun states that the women the son will meet as an adult: lui serviront d'ersatz d'mère bien que la quête de l'objet perdu ne soit jamais satisfaite.

32 See A. Bouhdiba, La sexualité en Islam 261; and Lacoste-Dujardin, Des mères 212.
assigned to her by society. Firstly, she is an object of sexual pleasure for the man, while her own sexuality is something to be feared, and secondly she is a producer of children, to be honored and respected. The character of the female is confined physically within the female domestic sphere and her access to the public sphere is severely limited. She is often deprived of a basic education which helps to maintain her ignorance. However, even the female characters who have obtained an education, such as the wife of El-Hadji in Xala, are conditioned into the submissive role of wife and mother. Active social conditioning as well as a passive fatalist acceptance of one’s social situation are the key elements that enable a society to easily subjugate and objectify the female being.

Upon her marriage, the emotional development of the young girl is stunted by severing her ties to her maternal home and by discouraging the development of a relationship with her spouse. Subjugated physically, mentally and emotionally, she becomes an object, submissive and dependent on the male members of the family. Moreover, it is socially necessary for her to obey to the mother-in-law, whose power is derived from maintaining the status-quo and preserving social boundaries and traditions.

The female exists in the background of all activity within a traditional marital space and is, according to Bouhdiba, 
"[un] être du foyer et de la nuit" who resides "dans l'ombre
de la vie masculine active". Confined to the domestic space, she performs her chores during the day waiting for the night and the return of the male members of the family. The intimate space of the bedroom is where the socially sanctioned roles are distinctly manifested. The woman is used by her husband as a sexual object with a specific goal in mind: to produce children. With a complete lack of communication between husband and wife and a blatant denial of her individuality, the female character realises that to exist as a viable being with some power she must produce children. Unwittingly, she becomes locked in the maternal role out of fear for her security and her desire for respect. The son-narrator in _La Civilisation_, *ma Mère!...* aptly describes the female condition:

> Sa vie était comme un puzzle. Sa vie intérieure qu'elle essayait de faire correspondre à la vie sociale qu'on attendait d'elle - mère et épouse. (La civil, 43)

The female literary characters, in an imitation of the prevalent female social condition, express a rupture in personal and social expectations. Inhibited and discouraged to develop not only as an individual, but also as an equal partner in marital space, her social worth is evaluated by her obedience to her husband. In her submission, she is fulfilling her duty to the *umma* in finite time, and in her fatalism is the hope of a reward in infinite time. The dual functions - obedient wife and good mother - become the 'natural' female

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33 Bouhdiba, *Sexualité* 261.
roles that define her existence. In performing these two functions she is socially accepted and defined as a 'better' woman than the female who is recalcitrant. Furthermore, from this elevated status of 'better' woman, any perceived deficiency destabilizes her bi-dimensional being and is considered 'unnatural'.

Two significant threats to her being and also her essential social definition are divorce or repudiation and polygamy. In the following chapters we will discuss these two concepts and their effects on the female character in literary space.
CHAPTER IV

POLYGYNOUS RELATIONSHIPS I

Having studied the status of the female character within literary marital spaces in the previous chapter, we will now study the female character living under specific conditions within those spaces. These conditions are created by an enlarging of as well as a partitioning of the marital space influenced by two socio-religious concepts. In the following two chapters these two concepts, repudiation and polygyny will be discussed in relation to African narrative space. An interrelated but distinct concept, that of concubinage, will be defined and discussed in Chapter V. However, before beginning the analysis in this chapter, it is imperative to define and clarify the terms repudiation and polygamy.

Firstly, the term repudiation is used in this work instead of divorce because it covers more clearly the situations to be discussed. Divorce implies a legal dissolution of the marriage contract, where the woman, in a traditional Islamic context, is left without financial support, the nafqa, to which she is entitled. Additionally, repudiation encompasses both divorce and rejection of the spouse without an official divorce. Repudiation can be defined not only as: "renvoyer sa femme en rompant le mariage" but also "rejeter, repousser". 

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As is often the case in the literary narratives we intend to discuss, the female character, living under the constant threat of repudiation, is rejected and cast aside in favor of another wife or companion. The status of an un-divorced, rejected wife does not however guarantee any form of financial support, and depending on the caprice of the husband, her maintenance allowance may be discontinued or reduced. In instances where this phenomenon of rejection occurs, the husband effectively creates a polygynous marital space. In African literary discourses, various forms of polygynous relationships are represented. The category of polygynous relationships as well as the dynamics that exist within such polygynous spaces are of interest for our study.

In Islamic tradition, the only legally sanctioned polygamous relationship is the acquisition of multiple wives contracted under the guidelines of the Qur'ân. Conforming to Islamic precepts, as mentioned in Chapter I, a Muslim male is permitted by divine decree to be concurrently married to four women. When referring to concurrent marriages the slightly modified term 'to re-marry' will be used throughout this text. Since 'to remarry' in an Occidental context normally implies 'another marriage' in sequence, after the death of a spouse or a divorce, we wish to emphasize that use of the terms 'to re-marry' or 're-marriage', implies a husband marrying an additional concurrent wife. Marital space according to the Occidental definition is constant and monogynous while, in the
context of this study, every re-marriage redefines and reconstructs the marital space.

In conformity with the guidelines of the Shari‘ah, an ideal polygynous relationship is established when the husband has adequate financial resources to support all of his wives, and is able to allocate an equal amount of his time for each wife in fulfillment of their conjugal rights\textsuperscript{2}. More often than not, these requirements are ignored by many husbands eager to re-marry, always to the detriment of their already established families. What ensues, as a consequence, is a form of repudiation, where the preceding wives and their children are abandoned in favor of the new wife. In such cases, the co-wives and their families are left emotionally and financially destitute.

In this chapter, we will examine narrative repudiation, that is, the abandonment of one wife for another in literary discourse as well as the effects of polygyny on the first wife. The literary treatment of both polygyny and repudiation are, in our opinion, reflections of the existent social condition of women. Our analysis includes a study of the social status of the female characters involved in polygynous relationships along with the physical and psychological space they occupy. The status and identity of the first wife, as will be demonstrated, stand in contrast to the social existence of the

\textsuperscript{2} For more details refer to Surah al-nisa (IV): 3, 130 in Le Saint Coran, and Doi, Shari‘ah: The Islamic Law 145.
other wives. The emotional suffering experienced by some of the female characters within polygynous spaces is a consequence of their powerlessness and subjugation to a narrative patriarchal social order that closely imitates the social structure of certain traditional societies whose underlying structure is based upon particular interpretations of Islamic doctrine.

In the second part of this study of polygynous space, that is in Chapter V, two types of female characters and their social condition will be examined. Firstly, we will analyze the marital space and the status of the second wife and, secondly, the different structures of illicit or religiously unsanctioned relationships presented in some literary discourses.

**Repudiation**

Certain instances of repudiation in literary discourse reflect, in a concise manner, the power that is wielded by the character of the husband over his wife. As has been discussed in the previous chapter, the female character, after her marriage, is completely dependent on the male. Exploiting this dependency, the husband can hold his wife in a state of constant insecurity by threatening her with divorce. This threat of divorce may be a consequence of any action, however trivial, taken by the wife, which has displeased the husband.
The form of divorce used under these circumstances is the *talaq al-bid'a*, defined in Chapter I.

This fear of repudiation, which is ever present in the life of the character of the wife, is a defining characteristic that molds her behavior. In Ousmane Sembène's *Taaw*[^3], the narrator expresses the feelings of the character of the mother, Yaye Dabo, who has just been threatened with divorce:

> Me répudier...? répéta Yaye Dabo. Elle avait souvent entendu ce mot. Chaque fois il creusait son ventre, lui inspirait de la crainte. Ce mot était plus effrayant, plus meurtrier que si elle était flagellée (*Taaw*, 181-182)

Another female character, Mi, the mother in *Messaouda* states:

> ...Il menaçait de me répudier. J'avais constamment peur. Il n'avait qu'un mot à prononcer ... (*Messa*, 50)

This apprehension is also expressed by the protagonist Nfissa in *Les Alouettes Naïves*[^4] who declares that all women are fearful of the absence of the male (68). Fear becomes a fundamental part of the personality of the female character, and is rooted in the socio-economic factors which influence her daily existence.

Always dependent on a male for economic sustenance, she is aware that her social status as a wife is constantly in the balance reducing her to unconditional dependence on the moods and whims of the husband and his family. This constant fear


also reflects a lack of emotional bonding and communication between the married couple. This fear of rejection, whether vocalized as in the case of Yaye Dabo, or expressed vaguely by Nfissa, is, moreover, an expression of female powerlessness when confronted with a social system in which the male has absolute power and moral authority. Anxiety and apprehension also emanate from the knowledge that her social status in society is wholly dependent on the male and a rejection, for reasons real or imagined, trivial or serious, involves a loss of the only social status which brings honor upon her being.

The woman is also aware that once she is 'given away' in marriage, she can no longer rely on the support of her own family.\(^5\) In such a state of isolation, the act of being repudiated would be a reflection of her failure to perform her socially prescribed duties as well as her neglect of religious guidelines, since she is bound by religious patriarchal ideology to obey and serve her husband (Refer to Chapter I).

To allay this fear, the female attempts, in her own way, to make sure that such a situation never occurs. Nfissa declares that "elles [les femmes] se dépêchent d'avoir enfant sur enfant pour étouffer la crainte... (Les alouettes, 68). Similarly, the narrator of Taaw states that the mother, Yaye Dabo:

\[
\text{avait tout payé de son corps, étouffant}
\]

\(^5\) An example of this lack of moral and financial support occurs in Messaouda when Mi, after having argued with her husband returns to her family. An angry grandfather informs her: "Rappelle-toi! ici, il n'y a plus de place pour toi ni pour toutes celles qui sont mariées", 65.
Wearing down her own body as a result of multiple births is a means of assuring her own security, particularly with the birth of sons. It is also a way of creating emotional bonds with the husband through the presence of children. These emotional links, if strong enough, may serve the wife and mother in the future, by preventing a hasty repudiation. Complete submission of the wife’s body for the sexual pleasure of the husband as well as of her mind to satisfy the husband’s assertion of superiority and authority is another way of ensuring that she is not rejected. Being cast aside, not unlike an undesired object, is a situation to be avoided, even though she may be treated as an object in her daily life. The wife considers acquiescence to the husband’s will a necessity of existence, because, as Mi states: “Répudiée, je ne vaudrais plus rien du tout” (Messa, 51).

Although fearful of their own marital security, women may use the threat of repudiation against other women. Yaye Dabo, who, herself, has always lived with the dread of being repudiated, is angered by the treatment meted out to her son,

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6 The importance of male offspring is the central theme of Tahar ben Jelloun’s L’enfant de sable (Paris: Seuil, 1985). The character of the mother having given birth to seven unwanted daughters is aware of her precarious position as wife and mother but is reassured by the father: “Je suis un homme de bien. Je ne te répudierai pas” (22). This apparent magnanimity on the part of the father has a price. He forces the mother to be an accomplice in his deceit. The deception of bringing up the youngest female child as a male, results in the mother living a life of psychological torture ending in insanity.
Taaw, by her younger brother’s first wife. Consequently, while discussing the situation with her brother and his family, she mockingly states to her sister-in-law: “Si je veux, je peux te faire répudier” (Taaw, 143). Despite the fact that this threat is not carried out, it is an example of how a woman can yield certain powers as an accomplice of the patriarchal system, to the obvious disadvantage of other women. The consequence of this internalization of patriarchal values and male dominance is a change in ontological status as the female ages. For the female who is an obedient accomplice, marriage, motherhood and the aging process lead to different definitions of being. At each stage she reaches a higher level of male acceptance and acquires a greater degree of power, until the peak is reached by the post-menopausal grandmother or female family elder. At this stage of her life, she is defined as a de-sexed female, or a masculine female wielding considerable power over male and female family members alike.

During her lifetime, as a reproducing, i.e. pre-menopausal wife or mother, the constant threat of repudiation can materialize at any instant, and can, depending on the mood of the husband, be efficiently carried out. In Messaouda, the mother, Mi, recounts the story of the father re-marrying a young woman (Messa, 56) and divorcing her nine months later:

Sa nouvelle épouse était très jeune, à peine treize ans... Il la répudia neuf mois après car elle ne lui donna pas d’enfants. (Messa, 58)
The ignorance of the father is evident in the fact that he expected his young bride to conceive during the first few days of their marriage and when that is not accomplished, her childlessness becomes an issue. In this situation, there is a complete disregard for the body and the being of the young girl, who is considered a procreating vessel required to reproduce within a male enforced timeline. This male attitude, although extreme, underlines the importance of a woman bearing a child within the biologically shortest possible time if she wishes to remain married.

Further along in the narrative, this whimsical divorce becomes a reality for Mi. The narrator explains Si Driss' desertion of his family and repudiation of Mi:

Mi répudiée trois fois. La répudiation était sans retour.... Mi, la femme répudiée, Mi, la femme rejetée. (Messa, 127-128)

This unilateral divorce removes Mi from the only closed space she has known, that of obedient wife, and leaves her and her children exposed in a society that demands protection. Redefined, as the narrator insists in his repetition of the words, as "répudiée" and "rejetée", Mi discovers that the only door she can knock on, that of religion, has already been closed by the baseness of the father. His abandonment, it is explained, is not complete without the complicity of the village religious leader, 'le cadî', who assists in denying the family their rights. The demonstration of male solidarity in denying the rights of the female being cannot be explained
simply as outmoded, barbarous and patriarchal. At the root of this attitude is a constant primal fear of the energy and the power of the female being. According a woman her rights in this instance would amount to admitting that a man acted wrongly and would give her the power to demand further concessions. An additional fear is that of setting a precedent by granting one woman her marital rights, which could create a domino effect of women demanding their rights. This, in turn, could result in the disintegration of male power and male control of the entire social space. Mi recognizes that male complicity and the hypocrisy of religious leaders is at the root of her subjugation and destitution:

...je n’ai rien fait pour mériter un tel sort. Mes enfants sont encore jeunes et le cadi leur refuse la pension alimentaire que la religion elle-même leur accorde. Driss l’a acheté pour que le talaq soit en sa faveur. (Messa, 128)

Another example of this male whim and absolute control is demonstrated in Le Passé Simple. The young boy/narrator explains the situation of his maternal aunt Kenza who is repudiated for a ridiculous reason:

La veille au soir, Kenza servait un bol de soupe. Cette soupe était froide. Mon oncle n’aime pas la soupe froide. Par conséquent, il a ramassé ses babouches et s’en est allé frapper à la porte de son voisin le notaire. Kenza était répudiée.7 Acte en bonne et due forme. (Passé, 93)

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7 A similar incident of repudiation is recounted briefly in Les alouettes naïves 141, where a young woman, Attika, is divorced by an angry husband for exchanging a used, rarely worn piece of clothing for a plastic bowl for washing her baby’s clothes. In this case, however, the repudiation is not rescinded and Attika, pitied by all, is also deprived of her child and lives with a cousin.
This swift act is later regretted by the husband, who uses the same neighbor to invalidate the initial act of repudiation. Throughout the enactment of this scenario, Kenza is a passive, silent actor, observing the actions of her husband, watching him wield his power as a husband and as a master. She is informed of the annulment of the repudiation when the husband declares:

- Je serai de retour dans une heure si Dieu le permet et il se peut que j’aie besoin d’un bol de soupe, Kenza (Passé, 96)

The narrator concludes the account of this incident with the following comment: "Kenza était de nouveau une épouse" (96). This incident demonstrates not only the constant marital insecurity that a woman suffers on a daily basis, but also the duties that she must perform, which are that of a perfect servant. The swiftness in which the act of repudiation is carried out in the presence of the notary, is an example of the effectiveness of male complicity and power in undermining female social identity. Having no influence on the progression of events that undercut her status, and having no opportunity to explain her actions, Kenza is transformed within a short time from the respected social position of wife to that of the undesirable divorcée and again to respected wife.

A return to the status of wife requires no apology from the husband for his hastiness in carrying out the repudiation or for his anger. However, a declaration by Kenza, promising
to keep the soup hot until the arrival of her 'maître et seigneur' (Passé, 94) is necessary for the assertion of female submission and of male power. Kenza is not unlike a puppet, silently enduring the temperamental manipulations of her husband and the eager complicity of a patriarchal social system willing to cultivate male authority and egoism.

In narrative discourse, these incidents of hasty repudiation are touched upon briefly by some of the authors we have discussed. The narrative brevity, which reflects the social reality of this act, does succeed in emphasizing the triviality of the underlying reasons of repudiation and the injustice of a socio-cultural system in which *talaq al-bid'a* is considered an appropriate form of female objectification and subjugation.

**Polygyny - the first wife**

When the question of polygyny is brought to the forefront in literary discourse, it is usually in context with the repudiation of one or more spouse(s). In this particular case, we refer to repudiation as the rejection without an official divorce of a spouse, usually the first wife, for a younger second wife. In this section, we intend to discuss the social situation of the character of the first wife along with the status transformations that occur after she has been rejected by her husband. The psychological and emotional turmoil that is manifest with such status changes is also of interest.
We begin with a study of the situation of Adja Awa Astou, the first wife of El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye in Xala, and of Ramatoulaye, the first wife of the deceased Modou, in Une si longue lettre. Both of these female characters belong to a space resembling the educated Senegalese middle class, and their narrative social identities are quite similar.

Adja Awa Astou converted to Islam, against the wishes of her family, so as to be able to marry El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye when he was a teacher of modest means (Xala, 24). She has devoted her life to her husband and their children, and has become a strict adherent of Islamic values:

Elle voulait être épouse selon les canons de l'Islam... La religion, l'éducation de ses enfants devinrent les raisons de son existence. (Xala, 39)

Following his first financial success, Abdou Kader Bèye took Awa Astou on the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, and thus they acquired the honorific, and morally and socially significant titles of El Hadji and Adja respectively. This financial success from which Adja Awa Astou reaped material benefits and spiritual fulfillment also enabled El Hadji to re-marry.

Not unlike Adja Awa Astou, Ramatoulaye married Modou, a student, against her parents wishes. Apart from her career as a teacher, Ramatoulaye has given birth to twelve children and is an able homemaker, taking pride in the domestic space she has organized (Lettre, 16, 34). Ramatoulaye, influenced by

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8 Mariama Bâ, Une si longue lettre (Dakar: Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, SD).
Western ideals of marriage, believes in the integrity of the couple as well as a nuclear family unit in which the extended family plays a limited role\(^9\). Her link to an extended family structure, contrary to African traditions and Islamic principles, is only through her love for her husband:

> J’aimais Modou. Je composais avec les siens. Je tolérais ses soeurs qui désertaient trop souvent leur foyer pour encombrer le mien. Elles se laissent nourrir et choyer. (Lettre, 33)

Both Ramatoulaye and Adja Awa Astou have created, to a certain degree, a dependent, socially conforming insulated space in which they believe that some aspects of socially accepted male behavior (in this case polygyny) will never occur. Ramatoulaye is extremely confident of her marital space because she holds the ideal of a ‘marriage for love’ as being above and beyond socio-religious traditions. Adja Awa Astou’s confidence ensues from the fact that she has changed her identity and her religion, that is, sacrificed who she was, to conform to the role of the wife of Abdou Kader Bèye.

Two other literary first wives, we find it necessary to mention here, are Yaye Dabo in *Taaw*, and the character of the mother in *La répudiation*\(^10\). In contrast to Adja Awa Astou and Ramatoulaye, both of these characters are illiterate women who have had traditionally arranged marriages at a young age.

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\(^9\) Ramatoulaye, having distanced herself from her own family who opposed her marriage, resents the frequent visits of her mother-in-law and her friends, but appreciates the father-in-law, who drops by occasionally but never sits down, 33-34.

Physically abused by her husband, Baye Tine, (Taaw, 66), Yaye Dabo lives in material poverty and mental submission. The mother in La répudiation, who is always referred to as ‘Ma’, lives a life of submission and traditional confinement:

... ma mère était condamnée à ne plus quitter la maison jusqu'à sa mort (Rép, 78)

These four literary female characters, Adja Awa Astou, Ramatoulaye, Yaye Dabo and Ma are all initially the ‘only wife’. As ‘The Wife’ they perform their traditional duties of housekeeping and childbearing and rearing and occupy the traditional social space of conformity and submission. Whether the female character follows a non-traditional ideology of marriage, as is the case of Ramatoulaye, or rigidly conforms to the existing socio-religious codes, as does Awa Astou starting with her religious conversion, her fate is to submit to male whim and suffer the consequences of becoming Wife No.1. A point to be noted in these literary discourses is that neither submission on the part of the female nor polygyny on the part of the male are limited to a particular social type of male or female. Rather, the notions of female servility and male prowess are prevalent, crossing narrative social classes, levels of education and often the accumulation of material wealth.

In the narratives mentioned above, the polygynous space created by the male character is occupied by two wives, i.e. the representation of bigamy is the norm. The exception is Xala, in which the narrative opens with the announcement of El
Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye’s third marriage. Therefore, in this work, his second wife, Oumi N’Doye, will be discussed not only in connection to Adja Awa Astou when the third marriage takes place, but also with reference to the relationship with the third wife, N’Goné. The discussion will center around the marital spaces these wives occupy as well as the emotional relationship of each woman to the husband. We will also attempt to elucidate on the motivations of female characters who marry an already married man as well as of the male character desiring a second or third wife.

A major dilemma that confronts the character of the polygynous husband is the manner in which he should notify his spouse(s) of a forthcoming marriage. The method of disclosure of a re-marriage is based, first, on the knowledge that the existent spouses will be displeased, and secondly, on the temerity of the husband. In Xala, before the final arrangements of the third marriage are made, El Hadji is provoked by N’Goné’s aunt, Yaye Bineta:

Tu as peur de tes femmes! ce sont tes femmes qui décident, portent les pantalons chez toi?
(Xala, 18)

This statement, made to counter El Hadji’s hesitations regarding the third marriage, is a well-aimed jab at El Hadji’s masculinity and power. Yaye Bineta continues provoking him by stating that he is a Muslim not a European (Xala, 20), implying clearly that a Muslim male should not be cowed by his wives.
Unable to tolerate the insinuations of Yaye Bineta, El Hadji, in direct opposition to Islamic law, makes his decision:

Quant à ses épouses, il n’avait pas à s’expliquer, juste à les informer (Xala, 20)

The reaction of El Hadji’s first wife, Adja Awa Astou, is tragically predictable. Having internalized the dominant male discourse which demands female obedience under all circumstances, she accepts the third marriage in silence. In this extreme instance of submission, suppressing even the slightest expression of her will, Adja Awa Astou is defined as a believer and an “épouse effacée selon les dogmes de la religion” (Xala, 69). Repressed into her socially accepted and religiously sanctioned role of submission, she has striven to suppress all feeling and passion. Having forced herself, after El Hadji’s second marriage which took place the same year as his initial financial success and the pilgrimage, to live in a cocoon of isolation, she has successfully created an unfeeling facade which she successfully displays to society. After attending her husband’s third wedding ceremony, which she does so that society will not label her jealous (Xala, 26), Adja Awa Astou questions her resurgent emotions:

La jalousie, avait-elle pensé, était bannie de son coeur. Quand, il y a longtemps de cela, son mari prit une seconde épouse, elle dissimula son affliction. (Xala, 38)

Oumi N’Doye, although unable to stop El Hadji’s third marriage is not as docile or as self-sacrificing as Adja Awa Astou. Having been the favorite co-wife, much to the detriment
of Adja Awa Astou, she realizes that her marital position has now become just as unstable as Adja Awa Astou’s has been since she became a co-wife. Even in her frustration with El Hadji’s re-marriage, Oumi N’Doye demonstrates a determination which Adja Awa Astou lacks:

Elle refusa d’être une cloîtrée, une oubliée, une qui ne voyait son homme que pour l’accouplement. (Xala, 60)

The reason behind this determination, which stands in stark contrast to Adja Awa Astou’s reactions, are significant and will be discussed at a later stage.

In Une si longue lettre, Modou does not inform Ramatoulaye of his impending second marriage, she, therefore, learns of the existence of a co-wife after the marriage ceremony has taken place. The manner in which the marriage is announced, as well as the characters who inform Ramatoulaye, are of interest and require discussion. Her informants are three men sent by Modou: Tamsir, Modou’s brother; Mawdo, a longtime family friend; and the Imam of the local mosque. With audacity, these three men enter into Ramatoulaye’s personal domestic space, and, with laughter, make allusions to Modou’s recently finalized second marriage. Oblivious to the allusions the men make concerning ‘the union of two beings’, Ramatoulaye worries that some tragedy has befallen Modou. The Imam quickly rectifies the situation:

Modou Fall...vivant pour toi, pour nous tous, Dieu merci. Il n’a fait qu’épouser une deuxième femme, ce jour. Nous venons de la Mosquée de Grand Dakar où a eu lieu
le mariage. (Lettre, 56)

With these words, the sense of security that Ramatoulaye has acquired during the twenty-five years of her marriage, is destroyed. These men, witnesses to Ramatoulaye’s shattered hopes, exhibit an unwavering determination against which she is powerless.

The fact that the first wife’s permission is required for a husband’s eventual remarriage is ignored by the male upholders of religious dogma, while the marriage itself is performed in religious space. Ramatoulaye’s vision of marriage and the family unit, and her identity as ‘wife and homemaker’ is crushed on three social fronts: by a representative of the religion, by her trusted friend and by a member of the family. These three men create a formidable, symbolic wall behind which Modou satisfies his desires, and which effectively separates Ramatoulaye from her once secure and emotionally stable marital life. Representing three fundamental aspects of a society: religion, friend and family, these men actually redefine Ramatoulaye’s role as a wife. Tamsir states:

...Il [Modou] te félicite pour votre quart de siècle de mariage où tu lui as donné tous les bonheurs qu’une femme doit à son mari... (Lettre, 57)

Tamsir then completes his short discourse on Ramatoulaye’s role as a wife by saying: “Tu es la première femme, une mère pour Modou, une amie pour Modou” (57). The significance of this statement is obviously in that the role and obligations of
those who fall under the label 'wife' are quite different from the duties of those who are classified as 'first wife'.

This socially accepted change requires not only a transformation in the emotional and psychological relationship that binds a wife to her husband but also signals a modification in the social duties of the wife. The 'new' co-wife becomes the husband's societal companion while the social prominence of the first wife fades. Another significant alteration takes place in the economic stability of the first wife whose nafaqa may be reduced to accommodate her co-wife/wives. As 'mère' and 'amie' she becomes a nurturer and a supporter, who is supposed to banish certain feelings, such as jealousy, and desist in making emotional demands on her husband. Adja Awa Astou has also undergone a similar emotional and physical transformation. Although El Hadji fulfills the obligation of spending the required days with his first wife, she and El Hadji no longer engage in any form of sexual relations. Her duties as first wife have been reduced to that of a good friend who will always support and encourage El Hadji (Xala, 52).

Within the narrative polygynous space of La répudiation, Si Zoubir, the polygynous husband, follows the principle of asking for the permission of his wife to re-marry. The son/narrator states:

Le père vint demander conseil à Ma qui fut tout de suite d'accord" (Rép, 63)
Not only does Ma agree to the marriage but suppressing all feeling, she volunteers to organize the festivities. The narrator give us insight into her true feelings when he says: "La mort sur le visage, elle prépara la fête" (Rép, 63). Questioning the acquiescence of his mother, the narrator/son wonders what the results of an opposition to the marriage would have been, but concludes:

Ma ne querrellait plus Dieu, elle se rangeait à son tour du coté des hommes. (Rép, 63)

This statement serves as an indication of the mother's powerlessness when confronted with a situation which is sanctioned by religion, but detrimental to the woman's emotional and psychological condition. Islam permits polygyny and religious tradition requires the submission of the wife to the husband, therefore, by opposing her husband's re-marriage she would be going against what is divinely sanctioned, and traditionally accepted.

These female characters, irrespective of the prior knowledge of the re-marriage of the husband, undergo similar changes in social and economic status, as well as emotional security. Having previously occupied the central position of control within their domestic/marital space, they are now shoved to the fringes of that same space. The privileged status of 'The Wife' becomes, upon the husband's re-marriage, obsolete. They must reconcile themselves to the secondary role of first wife and watch as the husband excludes them from his life, while society exalts them for their docility.
Adja Awa Astou, upon the third marriage of her husband, submits to rejection and a re-definition of her role as wife for the second time. The original emotional suffering experienced by her is revived when she attends her husband's third marriage with her co-wife. Her co-wife, Oumi N'Doye, experiencing this situation for the first time, endures similar suffering. The two co-wives relive their own marriages and a happiness, now irredeemably diminished. The narrator states:

...elles avaient vécu cet instant, le coeur comblé de promesses et de bonheur. Témoins, en ce jour, du bonheur d'une autre, d'une rivale, l'évocation de leur lune de miel donnait à toute chose un goût de fiel. Elles ressentaient de cruelles morsures d'amertume. (Xala, 37)

However, all feelings of betrayal and bitterness are suppressed by both women when confronted with the only option that would redefine their social space according to their will: divorce. Always under the tutelage of a male, Adja Awa Astou cannot imagine living alone and independent of male protection. Such has been her social indoctrination that, upon the suggestion of her daughter to obtain a divorce, the only alternative she can imagine is that of finding another husband: "Où irais-je à mon âge? Où trouverais-je un mari?" (Xala, 26).

Adja Awa Astou is aware of the practical problems of an existence outside a defined male dominated domestic sphere. Never having worked outside the home, the economic sustenance provided by a male would be essential for her survival. Additionally, if any subsequent marriage were to take place
then, at her age, as she aptly puts it, her social position would be reduced to that of third or fourth wife (*Xala*, 26). Continued economic sustenance, the label of ‘first wife’ as opposed to ‘divorcée’ or ‘nth wife’ as well as the well-being of her children are the factors that force Adja Awa Astou to subdue her emotions and suffer the consequences of her husband’s polygyny.

Similarly, El Hadji’s second wife, Oumi N’Doye, has two identity markers that define her role in society: wife and mother. Her identity as a mother along with the welfare of her children are of particular significance and concern. With these two social labels together with the responsibility of the children in mind, Oumi N’Doye, echoes Adja Awa Astou’s sentiments:

*Divorcer, pourquoi? Une femme seule sans l’assistance d’un homme ne peut que se prostituer pour vivre, faire vivre ses enfants. C’est notre pays qui le veut ainsi.* (*Xala*, 59)

This is an explicit indictment of a social structure that thrives on the powerlessness of women by restricting their lives to constant dependence. These women are constrained in a domestic sphere where their identity is defined by the socially esteemed designates of mother and wife. If they chose to leave their husband, these two co-wives would put their own respectability and the financial security of their children in jeopardy.

Nevertheless, Oumi N’Doye later changes her mind and leaves El Hadji. The consequences of such an action are
distinctly stated. El Hadji is not obliged to provide financial support for the children he has with Oumi N’Doye, and they have difficulties adjusting to more modest living conditions. After leaving the protection of her prosperous husband, Oumi N’Doye’s struggle to survive and her ‘fall from grace’ is explained by the narrator:

[Oumi N’Doye]... déchue de sa puissance économique d’alors, afin de se montrer femme moderne, allait de bureau en bureau, d’entreprise en entreprise pour avoir du travail. Ce revers de fortune lui fit connaître d’autres hommes aimant la vie facile... Et cette galante compagnie entraînait Oumi N’Doyé à des sorties nocturnes. (Xala, 155)

Her earlier prediction of the consequences of rejecting the label of ‘co-wife’ have come true and seem to be her fate. Oumi N’Doye’s identity as ‘mother’ is tarnished since she can no longer provide for her children. Furthermore, her rejection of her married status has stripped her of the social status of wife along with the respect and honor she derived from it. Her endeavors towards obtaining financial independence and redefining her existence as an individual are seen in a negative light. The tone of the narrator appears to be mocking when he claims that she is trying to be a ‘femme moderne’. The implication is that, had she repressed her desires and followed tradition, she would still occupy a respectable social status. However, the choice she has made, severing her ties to a male, has dire consequences: she has failed to be a good mother and has become a ‘fallen’ woman.
On the other hand, Adja Awa Astou, by remaining within the traditional framework of female identity, has maintained her economic stability together with her respectable position as first wife. Although El Hadji has continued the prescribed conjugal rotations, Adja Awa Astou’s repudiation is manifest in her suffering and bitterness. The repression of her emotions has led to a non-existent sexual relationship with her husband, but has accorded her the socially accepted role of ‘ever suffering first wife’ and ‘good’ mother.

The protagonist Ramatoulaye in Une si longue lettre, recovering from the shock of her husband’s re-marriage is confronted with her new, redefined social situation. Similar to Adja Awa Astou, a discussion on divorce is forced upon Ramatoulaye by her daughter who exclaims:

Romps, Mamam! Chasse cet homme. Il ne nous a pas respectées, ni toi, ni moi... (Lettre, 60)

For Ramatoulaye, contemplating a divorce results in balancing her hatred for polygyny and her feelings of betrayal with the practicalities of remaining the first wife. Her decision to remain with Modou originates from the fear of beginning a new life alone. Additionally, the thought of not finding another male companion due to the physical condition of her body is one of her primary concerns (Lettre, 62). Ramatoulaye, who has the capability of being financially independent, still chooses a situation in which her being is denied but in which she will be linked to a man. Moreover, her thoughts of divorce are closely connected to finding a new identity as someone else’s wife. By
rejecting the idea of her own re-marriage based upon the shape of her body, she confirms her social conditioning and acceptance of social norms that evaluate female eligibility. She judges herself not on her accomplishments, education and intelligence, but on the unattractiveness of her unyouthful body after many years of child bearing. One could state that Ramatoulaye is clearly aware of the fact that her society, not unlike most societies, objectifies females, reducing them to a body. This reified being constitutes a physical space that has to conform to male requirements of female beauty.

Furthermore, Ramatoulaye’s pride in her identity as a middle class wife and mother is transformed into bitterness. She resents being placed on the level of co-wife and takes umbrage at the equating, by Modou’s family, of her twenty-five years of marriage to the co-wife’s five years (Lettre, 11). The emotional betrayal and social injustice she experiences are exacerbated by financial abandonment. Not only does Modou stop providing financial assistance, but he also cheats Ramatoulaye out of their mutual savings to buy a villa for his new wife (Lettre, 20). Adjusting to her new life and identity proves a difficult task for Ramatoulaye, who bitterly states:

Je n’intéressais plus Modou et je le savais. ...Je n’étais pas divorcée... J’étais abandonnée: une feuille qui voltige mais qu’aucune main n’ose ramasser, aurait dit ma grand’mère. (Lettre, 77, 79)

Repeating this traditional adage, Ramatoulaye indicates her continued dependence on the male. Proud of her domestic sphere
and the home she has created for her family, Ramatoulaye cannot imagine it as ‘home’ without the presence of Modou. His remarriage and subsequent abandonment have left her in a state of emotional insecurity and solitude from which she does not know how to escape. Both Adja Awa Astou and Ramatoulaye enclose themselves in a cocoon of repressed emotions and self pity caused by social and personal injustices. However, their silent acceptance and continued suffering maintain a traditional marital space which they abhor and which denies them expression.

Removed from this educated, middle class world, Yaye Dabo, the character of the mother in *Taaw*, is aware of her rights in a polygynous situation. Left financially destitute and emotionally rejected by her husband, she has the knowledge and the courage to fight this repudiation by approaching the imam of the community, as well as confronting her husband. In response to the grievance, Baye Tine, the husband, is advised to continue his conjugal rotations but only after Yaye Dabo has knelt and begged his forgiveness. Irrespective of who has been wronged, this act is essential for re-establishing the hierarchical social order of female submission and male control.

It is also important to note that according to the religious laws defining polygyny, a husband is required to divide his time equally among his wives. However, after Yaye Dabo’s complaint, her husband is neither forced nor obliged by
the community elders to resume his conjugal rotations. He is simply advised ("conseillé", Taaw, 84) to do so. When Yaye Dabo courageously exercises her rights a second time in complaining about the non-resumption of conjugal sexual relationships, she is mistreated by her husband:

Le résultat fut plus pénible, plus humiliant. La nuit, Baye Tine la couvrit d’une avalanche de grossièretés... (Taaw, 87)

The third confrontation takes place when she asks her husband for money and inquires into his finances. His response is prompt and dismissive:

Qui es-tu pour que je t’en rende compte...? Que je justifie ma conduite? Ey! Ecoute-moi bien...Ici, c’est moi qui porte le pantalon (Taaw, 111)

A fearful Yaye Dabo attempts to calm him down by once again submitting herself and requesting forgiveness for having insulted him. His male superiority reasserted by Yaye Dabo’s submission, Baye Tine deigns to give her money. This money is not, however, given without an insult:

- Ceci en dédommagement moral de la peine que je te cause en prenant une seconde. (Taaw, 111)

In the three confrontations she has with male authority, Yaye Dabo is justified by religious law in making her particular demands. As a co-wife she has a right to a conjugal relationship on an equal footing with the other wife/wives. Similarly, it is her right to demand financial sustenance for herself and her children. Although she is granted what is her right in each instance, it is not without moral and emotional
cost. Humiliated by men who regulate and control society, her subjugation and degradation reaches a peak when her husband attempts to compensate for moral injustice and emotional suffering by offering her money. Unfortunately, Yaye Dabo has to accept the money while suppressing her emotions. Expressing the subjugation of Yaye Dabo, and a social system that condones it, the narrator could be speaking of any of the female characters we have discussed:

Elle acceptait toutes les souffrances que lui infligeait son mari afin que ses enfants réussissent dans la vie. N'est-ce pas le lot de la femme, de l'épouse? On le lui avait dit. On le croit. (Taaw, 87)

The categories of marital space occupied by the character of the wife are summed up in the figure and table on Pages 150 and 151. The two large circles indicate the marital space in a monogynous and polygynous situation respectively. The smaller circles are indicators of the space occupied by various wives. Circle 'b' which overlaps into the marital space, as mentioned in the following chart is the position of a wife who is both 'provided for' but removed from the central marital space. Circle 'c' represents the position and space occupied by an 'unprovided for' wife, who has been removed from the marital space but is still attached to it by the marriage contract. To the right of the diagram are mentioned various female characters that we have discussed, and the respective positions they occupy or have occupied in different marital situations in the literary narrative.
It is interesting to note that although Mi is the only wife, she does not exist at the center of the marital space due to the husband's 'preoccupations', which will be discussed in two upcoming chapters. After her repudiation, she does not occupy a space away from the original marital space (d) but is in the unique situation of having no space. The dissolution of her marital space leaves her in a communal public space in which she becomes, according to the narrator, a member of "la race des 'déracinés'" (Messa, 125).

Another peculiar social situation is that of Oumi N'Doye, who passes through three different stages of marital identification; from the preferred second wife (a2), her situation is reduced to that of the 'provided for' wife existing on the periphery (b). Finally, she is identified with the difficult and socially negated situation of the wife who abandons the marital space (d).

Figure 4.1 - Female Characters and Literary Marital Spaces
The following table summarizes the role and social position in narrative discourse of the various wives as well as the prevalent attitudes of the literary ummah along with that of the character of the husband.

Table 4.1 - Female Status and Acceptance in the Literary Ummah

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WIFE (monogyny) (a1)</th>
<th>POSITION IN MARITAL SPACE</th>
<th>COMMUNAL ATTITUDE AND ACCEPTANCE</th>
<th>ATTITUDE OF HUSBAND</th>
<th>ROLE OF WIFE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WIFE #1/ PRECEDING WIVES (polygyny)</td>
<td>center</td>
<td>appropriate morally correct honorable</td>
<td>center of attention</td>
<td>sexual and emotional partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIFE #1/ PRECEDING WIVES (polygyny)</td>
<td>unrepudiated (b)</td>
<td>appropriate morally correct honorable</td>
<td>financially obligated + conjugal relations</td>
<td>friend/adviser/provider of moral support usually no sexual relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>periphery -</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>repudiated (no official divorce) (c)</td>
<td>morally incorrect but accepted</td>
<td>no obligation - may provide support at whim</td>
<td>waits to fulfill role as demanded by husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIFE #2/ MOST RECENT WIFE (polygyny) (a2)</td>
<td>center</td>
<td>appropriate morally correct honorable</td>
<td>center of attention/ preferential treatment</td>
<td>sexual partner may also be emotional partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>none</td>
<td>morally reprehensible inappropriate dishonorable</td>
<td>rejection/condemnation no financial support</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A feeling of helplessness and acceptance of the status quo is common among the female characters we have discussed in this section. This powerlessness gives rise to a reliance on a perspective of looking at life which is deeply entrenched in traditional fatalism. According to this perspective, each life is determined by the will of Allah, and part of this mysterious and indiscernible destiny is human suffering and pain. The
divine will can never be denied, but can be modified by prayer and religious devotion.

Following this traditional thought pattern, Ramatoulaye reacts to her husband’s re-marriage by declaring it "le jeu du destin" (Lettre, 61). Confronted with a destiny over which they have very little control, the female characters often find a solution to their suffering in prayer. Ramatoulaye is depicted as always having prayer beads in hand, whereas for Adja Awa Astou, Islam is a crutch, to which she clings in her solitude. Religion and prayer, her only solace and escape from a predestined daily suffering, are compared, indicating an obvious Marxist influence, to a drug:

...comme d'autres s'isolent dans la drogue
... Adja Awa Astou trouvait dans la religion sa suffisante dose journalière. (Xala, 41)

By leaning on religion for moral sustenance and consolation, they survive the reality of their continued pain for the welfare of their children. It has been previously stated that one of the crucial factors that determine the path the first wife will take, is her offspring. In the following pages, we will examine the relationship the character of the first wife has to her children as well as the reactions of the children to their father’s polygyny. The two types of relationships that will be examined are the mother-son relationship in La répudiation and Taaw, and the mother-daughter relationship in Une si longue lettre and Xala.
The thirteen year old narrator of La répudiation is the preferred son of Ma. Although he describes his mother’s repudiation and the second marriage of his father with bitterness, he is at the same time filled with disdain for his mother’s submission. Lacking sympathy for her plight he states:

... répudiée et dévote. Ridicule, ma mère!
Je la haïssais, ... (Rép, 53)

These sentiments are repeated when he relates Ma’s superficially enthusiastic preparations for the wedding of her husband (Rép, 64). This contemptuous reaction can be simply stated as indifference to his mother’s condition or, more appropriately, as an indication of the son’s submission to the same social system. His powerlessness when faced with his father’s re-marriage and the subsequent repudiation of his mother results in the easiest, most socially acceptable reaction: that of woman-blaming and misogyny:

... haïr ma mère et, par une sorte de dérision, avilir toutes les femmes... (Rép, 65)

Despite the concern with his personal suffering he does make attempts to alleviate that of his mother’s. He recounts spreading rumors that his mother’s co-wife is ugly because “cela aide ma mère à vivre” (Rép, 93).

In the other mother-son relationship, Taaw, Yaye Dabo’s son is also of little assistance in emotionally supporting his mother. In fact, it is Yaye Dabo who actively protects Taaw from the abusive father, all the while suffering abuse herself.
Financially destitute, she struggles, first, to educate Taaw and, later, to support him and his pregnant girlfriend. Taaw has taken this protection for granted and is, in some ways, indifferent to the sacrifices his mother has made. He has reduced his mother to a mere convenience from which he will move on once his own personal circumstances improve. In these two cases, despite the many sacrifices of the mother, the understanding of the son for the mother’s suffering, both emotionally and financially, seems limited. It appears that the character of the son focuses inwards, reflecting, in an incoherent manner, more on his personal anguish than that of the mother’s.

In the representation of the daughters, the literary depiction is quite different. It is, in fact, opposite to that of the sons. The daughters’ anguish is projected outward in a lucid show of support for the mother. Daba and Rama, the daughters of Ramatoulaye and Adja Awa Astou respectively are actively concerned for their mother’s prevailing situation. Both advise the mother to divorce, all the while understanding the mother’s suffering: “Rama saisissait les moindres peines de sa mère” (Xala, 41). Daba’s support is manifest in her confrontation with the co-wife and her mother, (Lettre, 103), whereas Rama confronts her father only to be humiliated. Rama

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11 In La répudiation, the narrator’s brother, Zahir, reacts in a similar manner. His responses are also focused inwards, but in a more self-destructive manner. Upon the re-marriage of the father his recourse is to stay away from the house as much as possible and to drink.
is also aware of her mother’s reasons for remaining in the position of co-wife and tells her boyfriend:

- ...Lorsque nous nous marierons, je ferai tout pour qu’elle [la mère] divorce et vienne vivre avec nous (Xala, 78)

The daughters are not only supportive of their mothers but are also indicators of future change. This possibility of change is expressed in their personal relationships which point to a different male-female rapport together with conjugal relations based on spousal equality.
CHAPTER V

POLYGYNOUS RELATIONSHIPS II

In the previous chapter we concentrated on the socio-cultural position of the character of the first wife in narrative discourse. However, a study of polygyny and marital space in narrative discourse cannot be complete without some discussion regarding the other female characters that effect this space, namely the 'other' wives. It is our intent, in this chapter to examine two distinct groups of women that effect the marital space of the first wife and convert an established monogynous space into a polygynous one. Of interest to us are not only the socio-cultural space of the other 'junior' legal wives, but also of the concubine/mistress.

Before beginning the first discussion concerning legal co-wives in narrative discourse, we consider it important to define the term concubinage and situate it in a historical context within Islamic tradition. Concubinage may be defined as a relationship in which a man and a woman cohabit without a legal marriage contract. The word concubine will be used instead of mistress in particular contexts which define a specific hierarchical and power structure. A concubine implies a woman who is under the direct tutelage of a 'master' and is completely submissive and powerless in her relationship with the 'master', whereas a mistress may be more independent and may wield a certain power.
We further prefer the use of the term concubine, since a tradition of concubinage has existed in Islamic history and may still be prevalent in certain Islamic societies. Furthermore, in a historical context, concubinage was customarily associated with slavery. Slavery was prevalent in the Hijâz during the rise of Islam and the possession of slaves by Muslim men was a common practice. Concubines were, for the most part, either purchased female slaves, women acquired as prisoners or female slaves presented as gifts. Although Islam encouraged the emancipation of slaves, it did not, however, forbid the practice, and women were kept as concubines without becoming legal wives. Nevertheless, the children of concubines were recognized as the legitimate offspring of the owner.

From the perspective of religious doctrine, there are three Qur'ânic verses that refer to female slaves as being sexually available (legally or otherwise) to the male owner. In Surah al-nisa' certain verses state that a man may marry a 'believing' slave¹. Furthermore, it is stated that a man is forbidden to marry a woman who is already married, that is, polyandry is prohibited. Forbidding polyandry but permitting marriage to already married or non-believing slaves² would be contradictory, therefore, one may assume that the implication

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¹ Le Saint Coran, Surah al-nisa' (IV): 3, 25. The correct wording of the translation is "ce que vos mains droites possèdent" which may refer equally to slaves or captives, n. 4, p. 77.

² Surah al-nisa' (IV):24: Vous sont interdites... les dames (qui ont un mari), sauf si elles sont vos esclaves en toute propriété...
of this verse is that already married female slaves and captives are available for the sexual pleasure of the Muslim male owner/captor 'as wives', but not as legal wives. Muhammed, the Prophet of Islam, is said to have had two non-believing concubines; Mary the Copt, presented to him by the Christian governor of Egypt, and a "young Jewess, Raihanah bint Zaid". Despite its accepted existence in Islamic tradition, concubinage, today, occupies an ambiguous position within the ummah. Certain Muslim communities have declared that concubinage was a privilege accorded only to the Prophet, whereas, others say that it is an irrelevant issue for the present day and age.

For the purpose of our discussion, what is relevant, is a consideration of the type of conjugal relationship that can be defined as concubinage. We can readily state that a female slave or captive involved in a sustained sexual relationship with her owner/captive, but without an official wedding contract is a concubine. This brings to the forefront the question of how one defines a female 'slave' or 'captive'. Again, for the benefit of our discussion, we can state that a female slave could be such a being who has not necessarily been purchased, but is one who is submissive to, and under the


4 Abbott states that Raihanah bint Zaid preferred to remain a concubine, which allowed her to practice her religion and avoid the seclusion imposed on the wives of Muhammed.
control of a master. Furthermore, no recourse is available to her for obtaining any form of financial, emotional or physical freedom. Most importantly, the female ‘slave’ or ‘captive’ has no recognized social status, that is, one that would bestow honor in the socio-religious hierarchy of the ummah.

In our analysis of illicit male-female relationships, we will study the identity and function of the female characters who may be concubines, mistresses or simply objects of male sexual obsession and perversion. Lastly, in this chapter, we will study the literary character of the husband, and consider his motivations in contracting a ‘new’ marriage or entering into an illicit relationship, as well as the social reactions to his decisions.

**Polygyny - the second wife**

In analyzing the co-wives of the first wife, the general term second wife will be employed. This term is used because most of the literary characters we will discuss here occupy the role of second wife, except as we have mentioned previously, in Xala. In that particular case, if it becomes necessary to discuss both the second and third wives at the same time, we shall use the labels “most recent wife 1” and “most recent wife 2” following our labeling on the chart in the previous chapter. We will examine the narrative social situation of these female characters both before and after their marriage. Their motivations for marriage are very distinct from those of the
first wife and affect the social and marital space they occupy. The female characters we intend to study are Oumi N’Doye and N’Goné, the co-wives of Adja Awa Astou, Binetou the co-wife of Ramatoulaye, and Zoubida the co-wife of Ma.

As mentioned earlier, one of the results of El Hadji’s first financial successes was his marriage to Oumi N’Doye. Oumi N’Doye comes from a poor family accustomed to living in crowded conditions (Xala 154), however, her marriage to El Hadji has moved her into a different social class where she readily exploits his wealth and status. Occupying the position of the favorite second wife, she is depicted as a manipulative and selfish social climber. Intent on remaining El Hadji’s preferred wife, she, in a stereotypical depiction of the post-colonial bourgeoisie, prepares a meal with French wine, water and cheeses for El Hadji, the menu for which has been taken from a French magazine. Behind the preparation of this meal is her determination to maintain her social space based upon the advice of a friend:

- Pour avoir la faveur de son homme, une épouse en compétition se doit d’avoir comme cible les deux centres vulnérables du mâle: le ventre et le sexe...(Xala, 86)

El Hadji, meanwhile, is aware of Oumi N’Doye’s materialism and knows that her concern and care hinge on the material comforts he can provide. By humoring Oumi N’Doye’s upstart bourgeois materialism, El Hadji maintains the simple exchange that links him and his second wife: he provides the money, she provides a passionate sexual relationship. When El Hadji, due
to his xala, is unable to 'perform', she is easily placated. The narrator explains:

Pour se faire pardonner sa conduite de la nuit passé, il [El Hadji] offrit une forte somme à la femme. À la vue des liasses, Oumi N'Doye se fit indulgente (Xala, 90).

Interested only in financial benefits, Oumi N'Doye stands in stark contrast to the self effacing Adja Awa Astou. Having usurped Adja Awa Astou's marital position, and unable to tolerate her own loss of position and space upon the third marriage of El Hadji, she leaves taking all the furniture:

Femme avisée, ... à la faveur de la pénombre, aidée par ses frères, sœurs, cousins, elle vida... la villa jusqu'aux rideaux, frigidaires, tapis etc. (Xala, 154)

This unsympathetic depiction of a greedy, materialistic woman is a recurrent image in literary discourses where the main theme is polygyny. This type of avid materialism is, essentially, a consequence of socio-religious traditions that negate and deny the economic potential of a female. This reduces the female to the level of a parasite, conditioning her to materially exploit her marital situation.

In the case of El Hadji's third wife, the greedy woman is Ngoné's aunt, Yaye Bineta. She is the aggressive force behind the third marriage and her status will be discussed at a later stage. Ngoné is a nineteen year old who has failed her school examinations. Not unlike Oumi N'Doye, Ngoné comes from a poor family with seven siblings. Once Ngoné's parents decide that it is time for her to marry, Yaye Bineta is given the
responsibility of finding a suitable match. Yaye Bineta, insistent upon finding a wealthy husband, proves quite resourceful and introduces N’Goné to El Hadji.

Ngoné’s role in the literary narrative is passive, she neither voices any opinion nor is she active within her own marital space. Ngoné never utters anything of significance, it is always her aunt who speaks for her, even on her wedding night (Xala, 42-43). Adja Awa Astou, the submissive first wife describes her as a victim (Xala, 26). Although seemingly understanding of N’Goné victimization, the co-wives still condemn her as a ‘husband stealer’. Indeed N’Goné is a victim of socio-economic factors. She is a victim of her family’s social class, and consequently becomes the object of their quest for wealth and status. Her youth and beauty, the two socially significant criteria for a prospective marriage, are flaunted to lure a wealthy middle-aged man in search of a youthful body.

The objectification of N’Goné’s body and the passivity of her mind are exemplified when she lies on her nuptial bed offering her body to El Hadji (Xala, 43). The marriage contract involves a barter in which N’Goné body is exchanged by her family for material gains which include a home and a car, used by all her siblings as well as Yaye Bineta (Xala, 98). Within the limits of the space prescribed for the second wife, N’Goné is a silent victim who is being socially conditioned to sell her body in exchange for material wealth. One could state
that N’Goné’s youth and passivity represent what Oumi N’Doye must have been like at the time of her own marriage to El Hadji. Additionally, Oumi N’Doye may characterize what N’Goné may become, after years in an unfulfilling marriage during which she will have internalized the notion that using her body is the easiest means to access material wealth.

In Une si longue lettre, Ramatoulaye’s criticism of her co-wife, Binetou, and her family is quite harsh. As in Xala, Binetou is depicted as a voiceless object at the mercy of her family. A teenager from a poor family, she is a school friend of Ramatoulaye’s eldest daughter Daba. Ramatoulaye’s first descriptions of Binetou are concentrated on her physical appearance and her lower social-economic class:

... un peu timide, frêle, mal à l’aise, visiblement, dans notre cadre de vie. Mais comme elle était jolie,..., dans ses vêtements délavés mais propres! Sa beauté resplendissait, pure. Les courbes harmonieuses de son corps ne pouvaient passer inaperçues (Lettre, 54).

Modou begins his relationship with Binetou by offering to take her home after she has been studying with Daba. It is through Daba’s comments that one learns of Binetou’s relationship with Modou, whom she refers to as “le vieux”. Binetou, it appears is getting used to the expensive gifts she receives, while her mother actively encourages the relationship. Daba in a discussion with Ramatoulaye states:

Forced by her parents, who are blinded by the material comforts Modou has promised, Binetou becomes Modou’s wife. Although Ramatoulaye feels betrayed by Modou’s actions and subsequent marriage, her bitterness and anger is not directed towards him, but towards Binetou’s family. Apparently understanding Binetou’s powerlessness, she states:

Binetou est un agneau immolé comme beaucoup d’autres sur l’autel du “matériel” (Lettre, 60).

This comment clearly vindicates Binetou of all responsibility, however, Ramatoulaye in her condemnation of blatant materialism, forgets that Binetou is also a victim of Modou’s desires and fantasies. Implying that Binetou’s situation is a common occurrence, she is the ‘innocent’ participant in a social situation that expresses her symbolic death.

Voiceless and powerless before her demanding family, her voice was initially expressed through Daba, however after her marriage she loses that channel of expression. With the beginning of her marriage, ends not only her voice but her education and any personal desires she may have had. It symbolizes the closing of a space within which Binetou could have had self-expression had she so chosen. With this closure, the only space that opens up for her is that of submission and obedience, to a family intent on material betterment and a husband for whom she is nothing but a female body. Indeed, when not labeling her as ‘muette’, ‘hagarde’ and ‘vendue’, Ramatoulaye speculates on what Binetou might be feeling during an evening out with Modou to a night club:
L’image de sa vie qu’elle avait assassinée lui crevait le cœur (Lettre, 75).

This appropriation of Binetou’s thoughts by Ramatoulaye is pure speculation because Ramatoulaye, the first person narrator, was not present when this incident took place. Additionally, her rare encounters with Binetou take place only after Modou’s death, providing her with no opportunity to discuss personal matters. Although recognizing Binetou as a victim of dominant social values, Ramatoulaye remains unsympathetic to Binetou’s situation. In addition, she assists in silencing Binetou by deciding what she is and by speculating what she should or might be feeling. One can, however, state that Ramatoulaye, in assuming what Binetou is experiencing, is, subconsciously, expressing her own state of being. It can be suggested that Ramatoulaye has, years ago, by the choice she made to marry Modou, closed herself to a certain lifestyle that she could have had with Daouda Dieng. Despite her own suffering and mental anguish, Ramatoulaye, while recognizing Binetou as a victim, is an active participant, along with Binetou’s family and Modou, in silencing Binetou and assigning to her a passive social role.

Lastly, in this section, we will discuss the situation of Zoubida, the second wife of Si Zoubir and the co-wife of Ma. As with the other characters of the second wife, Zoubida is defined by the narrator as beautiful and young. She is only fifteen years old whereas, Si Zoubir is fifty (Rêp, 64). The
character of Zoubida is once again a voiceless one, and her objectification is obvious from three different perspectives. For Si Zoubir, Zoubida is a pliant body, an object that he can use for his own sexual satisfaction (Rép, 65). Zoubida’s family attitude, on the other hand, is based on economic benefits. The narrator explains:

Elle [Zoubida] venait d’une famille pauvre et le père n’avait certainement pas lésiné sur le prix (Rép, 64).

Indeed, Zoubida and Si Zoubir’s marriage is described as the conclusion of “une affaire financière” (Rép, 124), in which Zoubida is the object sold by one side for money and bought by the other for sexual pleasure.

The third perspective is that of the narrator, for whom Zoubida becomes an object of sexual obsession:

Zoubida, marâtre merveilleuse! Chaque sein est une pleine lune. Les yeux sont une constante invitation à la salacité…

Ventre large. Cheveux lourds. (Rép, 116)

Fixated with her body and her age, which must be close to that of the narrator himself, and with his father’s apparent sexual satisfaction with her, the narrator’s curiosity leads him to an illicit sexual relationship with his step-mother. Although it may be interpreted that this incestuous5 relationship is a form of revenge, it is more obviously an acceptance of Zoubida as a sexual object to be used, without any consideration for her

5 The narrator refers to his relationship with his step-mother as incestuous and according to Islamic restrictions concerning marriage, this relation is forbidden. See Le Saint Coran, Surah al-nisa’ (IV): 23-25.
consciousness. Zoubida’s consent to this sexual relationship is an extension of her own self evaluation as a sexual being. Furthermore, Zoubida’s willingness is nothing but the acceptance of a situation over which she has no control, and of a social role that she has internalized. Quite appropriately, Zoubida is described more than once by the narrator as a hostage (Rép, 65, 116), which alone describes her social condition and existence. She is a hostage of other people’s desires and wishes, be they financial or sexual. Silent and powerless, not unlike the other second wives, she is an object to be used and exchanged without any reflection on her individuality. Seen through the adolescent eyes of the narrator, she is described by him, and her words are projected to the reader through him. Her existence in the narrative marital space is a perspective of the narrator’s socialization, which allows him to objectify not only Zoubida but also his own mother, Ma.

The difference between Zoubida and the character of the other second wives we have discussed is that there seems to be no concern on her part for material wealth, however we can state that not unlike N’Goné, this may be related to her age and lack of self expression in a new social space. We have, in the following table, summarized some of the qualities or characteristics of the first wife in contrast with other co-wives, all the while referring to the different social and
familial pressures that bear upon the women co-habiting within a polygynous space in literary narrative:

Table 5.1 - A Comparison of Literary Co-Wives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st WIFE</th>
<th>CO-WIFE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>old and tired</td>
<td>young and beautiful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>partner in struggle/survival</td>
<td>object of sexual desire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self effacing, patient, docile</td>
<td>demanding, selfish and manipulative (wife and/or family)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>victim of love for husband</td>
<td>victim of family's social status/quest for status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>will to choose: love for husband over family</td>
<td>lack of will: choices made by family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>motivated by love/ rejection of family's wishes</td>
<td>motivated by material wealth/ 'sacrificed' by family for money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voiceless: obedience to husband</td>
<td>voiceless: obedience to husband and family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voiced suffering - expressed in narration</td>
<td>voiceless suffering - conjectured/speculated in narration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fulfilling marriage prior to creation of polygynous space</td>
<td>unfulfilling marriage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Meanwhile some characteristics common to all the wives inhabiting a polygynous space are: dependence on and submissiveness to the husband, obedience to socio-religious norms and traditions, and suffering for the well-being of their children.

We have, in this section, only discussed one polygynous situation in narrative discourse. This particular social situation is that of the youthful second wife of a wealthy, middle-aged man. However, in the literary discourses we have examined, there is one potential polygynous situation that
needs to be mentioned, not only for the fact that it is a possibility that does not take place, but also for the character involved, namely Ramatoulaye, the first wife and now widow, who is propositioned to become a second wife. After commemorating the completion of one of the official mourning periods\(^6\) required by Islam, Ramatoulaye is approached by her deceased husband’s brother, Tamsir.

In a scene that appears to be the mirror image of an earlier incident, Tamsir enters Ramatoulaye’s personal space, this time her bedroom, accompanied by Mawdo and the neighborhood Imam. The first such visit occurred when they came to announce Modou’s re-marriage, however, this time, they have united again, friend, family and religion, to announce another marriage to her. Tamsir addresses her directly:

\[\text{Après ta ‘sortie’...}, \text{ je t’épouse. Tu me conviens comme femme... En général, c’est le petit frère qui hérite de l’épouse laissé par son aîné. Ici, c’est le contraire... Je t’épouse. (Lettre, 84)}\]

\(^6\) The first mourning period lasts forty days, during which the family prays for the soul of the departed. It is at the end of this period that Ramatoulaye forgives her husband. The second period is four months and ten days long, and is observed only by the widow of the deceased man. Traditionally, during this period, a widow is confined to her house, often to a single room and usually has contact only with men who are her direct blood relatives (men with whom she cannot engage in licit sexual relations). This extended period of mourning for the widow is based on the importance of paternity in a patriarchal society. For example, if a widow were to be pregnant, this period would confirm the paternity of the deceased husband. However, if she were to remarry soon after her husband’s death and also be/become pregnant some doubt could be cast on the child’s paternity and as a consequence inheritance rights could be contested. Once this mourning period is over, the widow, if she so desires and is desired, may remarry.
Tamsir and his companions are not only violating Ramatoulaye’s personal physical space, but also the psychological space of the widow’s mourning period. During the designated mourning period, a widow is supposed to spend her time in reflection removed from worldly concerns. Specifically forbidden to the widow is any contact with males who are not related to her by a direct blood line. Tamsir and his companions fall within the category of non blood relatives.

Backed by the friend and the representative of religion, Tamsir, rather than proposing marriage, seems to simply state that a new marital space has been created for Ramatoulaye, which she, by tradition, is obliged to accept. There is an apparent lack of consideration for either Ramatoulaye’s feelings or her opinions. In the opinion of these men, she is a woman without a man, therefore, some male protection must be found for her. Their misplaced concern for her well-being is primarily based on the ancient tradition of levirate marriages. In such a marriage the widow, treated as an object of inheritance, is obligated, after her mourning period, to marry the brother of the deceased. Formerly a common

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7 For more information on levirate and sororate (man marries his deceased wife’s sister) marriages refer to John S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy (London: Heinemann, 1969) 142-145. An ancient tradition of inheritance, levirate marriages were declared illicit by Islam, see Le Saint Coran, Surah al-nisa’ (IV):19. Nonetheless, levirate marriage is still a strong tradition in many societies.

8 Another incident of levirate marriage occurs in Ousmane Sembène’s Les bouts de bois de Dieu (Paris: Le Livre Contemporain, 1960). The protagonist Bakayoko is married to his older brother’s widow, Assitan, and has adopted their child.
practice, this form of marriage ensured financial sustenance for the widow and her children all the while keeping the children and their inheritance within their father’s family space.

In their self-righteousness, Tamsir and his friends appear to have forgotten that Ramatoulaye, since Modou’s re-marriage, has been living without the required and deemed necessary male protection. Ramatoulaye’s outrage at this male intrusion is the first instance of assertive resistance in the narrative. She expresses shock that Tamsir has the temerity to proposition her during her mourning period. In addition, she questions his motives as well as his lack of concern for his two current wives. Breaking the silence which she has maintained for many years is, at one level, an indication of her desire to no longer be manipulated by a society which places the wishes of men above that of women. By verbally opposing the wishes of Tamsir, who may be viewed as the image of Modou, she is not only declaring her hatred for a polygynous marital space that denies women their voice, but is also establishing a space independent of male influence. From a traditional point of view, one can view Ramatoulaye’s actions as destructive because she is pitting herself against Modou’s family which is also considered to be the family of her children.

Although she expresses her anger and disdain in her own personal space, her words are actually a public statement made to society because the three men present, as we have mentioned
before, represent specific groups of a society. To be noted, as well, is the fact that she speaks to Tamsir in front of two appropriate male witnesses, which is required by religious law for official statements.

At another level, Ramatoulaye’s outburst is quite late in coming, and may be examined in the light of a calculated decision to maintain a particular social space for herself. Her silence at the time of Modou’s re-marriage was a carefully evaluated resolution to maintain the title of ‘first wife’ or ‘co-wife’ instead of acquiring the label ‘divorcée’. Despite the suffering caused by Modou, Ramatoulaye tolerates his behavior during his life time, and forgives him after his death. The confrontation she should have had with Modou is conveniently postponed until Tamsir propositions her. This unleashing of suppressed anger and resentment may be interpreted as a defense of the label ‘widow’, or maybe even the more socially honorable, ‘suffering first wife now widow’, as well as a rejection of the label ‘third wife’ which is offered by Tamsir.

Ramatoulaye’s refusal to be the ‘nth’ wife is a ‘luxury’ she can afford. In contrast to the other ‘nth’ wives (Binetou, Ngoné, etc.), Ramatoulaye is financially independent and can

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9 Ramatoulaye receives two proposals after her widowhood. The second proposal is from a former suitor, Daouda Dieng. In her written response she rejects the polygynous marital space he has offered her, however, she does admit that her refusal is based upon her lack of intense feelings for Daouda and her continued love for Modou. Her antipathy towards polygyny is so far from her mind that she wishes she could forget Modou and accept Daouda’s offer (Lettre 87, 97).
enjoy the title of 'widow', which is the only accepted social status for a woman living outside the bounds of a male protected space.

In literary narrative the second or third wives are essential characters within polygynous space, however, they are always observed through the eyes of other characters. Who they are as individuals or how they identify themselves is never expressed. These 'nth' wives, nearly always young women, are labeled and categorized according to the perceptions of the characters whose lives they effect. They are scorned by the first wife as 'husband snatchers', extolled for their youthful body by their middle aged husbands and exchanged for financial gain by their families. These three different points of view complete a biased picture of a female character whose own essence is denied.

**Illicit relationships**

Having examined the status of the female character within a traditionally accepted and religiously sanctioned polygynous conjugal space, we will now take a closer look at unsanctioned conjugal situations in literary space. This category of unsanctioned relationships can be divided into two groups. The first is the category of concubinage or sustained relationships which are characterized by financial maintenance and provision of lodging, i.e. the male fulfills the obligated *nafaqa* in an illicit relationship. The other category is that
of temporary relationships, and is often dominated by sexual licentiousness. This type of sexual relationship may range from regular visits to one prostitute to frequenting many prostitutes at least once. Although such a relationship may be continued over a period of time, there is no financial obligation on the part of the male beyond a payment for 'services'. These relationships are often characterized by emphasis on the physical attributes of the woman in question to the detriment of her existence as a 'complete' or whole being. Their submission to a patriarchal social order is as complete as that of the legal wives but differs in its nature. Moreover, the illegality of these relationships adds elements of religious hypocrisy as well as lust and perversion.

Two female characters that live under the tutelage of a male in a sustained illicit polygynous relationship are Aïcha in Driss Chraïbi's Le passé simple and Selma in Rachid Boudjedra's L'insolation. Aïcha, the mistress of the narrator's father, le Seigneur, lives on his farm far from the oppressive marital space he has created for his wife. Although the narrator encounters her in the open courtyard of the farm, her life is as oppressive as that of the mother enclosed within the four walls of the house. The reduction of Aïcha to a mindless body began the day she was first noticed by the father:

- Souk Larbaa, dit le Seigneur, un jour de

juillet, j’y étais allé... acheter une jument, je crois, ou de la semence de fenugrec. Aïcha savonnait ses seins sous une tente... (Passé, 235)

The fact that le Seigneur brings Aïcha back from the market is suggestive in itself of an object that is bought. Not unlike a voyeur, he observes her bathing, violating her personal space (the tent) with his physical presence, as well as her body with his eyes. Additionally, this intrusion signifies a lack of respect for Aïcha’s person and the reduction of her body to one sexualized part, namely her breasts. The utilization and proximity of the words “jument” and “semence” with Aïcha’s body are not coincidental. We can draw the parallel that Aïcha is the “jument” that he acquires at the market, and the “semence” he will sow will be his own. Likened to an animal that is purchased, he appropriately takes her not to the city but to the farm. The comparison with a horse is carried further by the narrator, who upon seeing Aïcha for the first time describes her posterior as “la croupe” and her laughter as being “à toute galopade” (Passé, 233)\textsuperscript{11}. Aïcha, thus reduced, is used by the Seigneur for his sexual pleasure.

The reification of Aïcha is further expressed through her two children, whom the Seigneur refers to as “bâtards” (Passé,

\textsuperscript{11} Thérèse Michel Mansour in \textit{La portée esthétique du signe dans le texte maghrébin} (Paris: Publisud, 1994) 112-113, has analyzed Aïcha’s objectification and reduction to animal qualities.
236). Implying both illegitimate and inferior\(^{12}\), these children are "animalized" by the father who demonstrates a distinct disinterest in their existence:

\[
\text{ils [les enfants] sont quelque part... en compagnie du bétail... ils rentrent le soir, avec le bétail.} (\text{Passé, 236})
\]

Aïcha and her children are objectified to such an extent that le Seigneur does not introduce his legitimate son (the narrator) to Aïcha, but shows her to him, like one would present an animal. Referring to his illegitimate children, he states: "je te les montrerai ce soir" (Passé, 236). The Seigneur's lack of concern for his children is not surprising since Aïcha was not "acquired" for procreation (as was his wife) but for sexual pleasure. For this reason, Aïcha's youthful body is the object of his obsession, and when her body does not conform to his requirements and desires, that is when she is pregnant, he finds her unattractive and deformed (Passé, 236). In this relationship neither Aïcha nor her children exist as "humans". By objectifying them as inferior beings, le Seigneur easily skirts the socio-religious moral questions that arise from an illicit sexual relationship.

The polygynous social space in \textit{L'insolation}, quite distinct from those that we have already studied, is simply defined by the narrator in the following way:

\[
\text{Il y avait deux femmes dans l'énorme maison}
\]

\(^{12}\) \textit{Websters Ninth Collegiate Dictionary} (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster Inc., 1987) 94, defines 'bastard' as both 'an illegitimate child or someone of inferior breed or kind'. Refer also to \textit{Le Petit Robert} 202.
Siomar is a rich landowner who has one legally contracted wife, Malika, and a concubine, Malika’s younger sister, Selma. The relationship that exists between Selma, who is referred to both as mistress (88) and concubine (226) in the text, and Siomar, a rich landowner, requires some discussion. The nature of this relationship, examined within the context of the ummah, is doubly illicit because it involves firstly, a non-contracted relationship and secondly, a union expressly forbidden by the Qur’ân 13. By taking Selma as his concubine, it is apparent that Siomar, who has been to Mecca three times (Inso, 85) is in violation of a fundamental Qur’ânic interdiction. The situation of Selma and Malika is additionally unique in that they occupy one common marital space.

Both Selma’s introduction into this space and the existence of the two women within it are of particular interest to our study. Selma enters this prohibited conjugal space when she is raped by Siomar the day after his marriage to Malika:

Il [Siomar] l’avait coincée au moment où elle se baissait pour remonter le seau d’eau qu’elle avait jeté dans le puits. Et là, dans une plaque de soleil, il l’avait violentée et

13 In Le Saint Coran, Surah al-nisa’ (IV):22-24 outline the prohibitions concerning marriage. Verse 23 states:

"Vous sont interdites ... de même que deux sœurs réunies - exception faite pour le passé ...

The exegesis of this interdiction (81) explains that "sœurs réunies" means "sœurs utérines ou par allaitement". It further states that "Il n’est pas interdit d’épouser la deuxième sœur après le divorce ou le décès de la première."
penetrée... (Inso, 87)

The narrator, in describing the violation of Selma's body, compares it to that of an animal that is slaughtered:

à la manière des moutons de mon enfance que j'avais vu tuer et dépecer (Inso, 85)

Indeed, as an animal is butchered for bodily nourishment, Selma's life is slaughtered by Siomar for his sexual pleasure. Continuing this analogy further, we can state that as an animal bleeds to death, Selma's blood following her rape signifies the end of a 'normal' social existence within a sanctioned marital space. This is explicitly stated by the narrator:

il [Siomar] avait fini par la déposséder de son plus précieux atout pour un éventuel mariage (Inso, 88)

Not only is there a physical manifestation of the closure of a particular social space for Selma, demonstrated here by the loss of her virginity, but also a psychological consequence, namely social dishonor. An animal slaughtered for nourishment is silenced by the knife and is then cut into pieces, in a similar manner, Siomar's sexual organ fulfills the function of the knife, effectively overpowering and silencing Selma. Additionally, Selma is broken psychologically and emotionally by the continuous slicing of this knife. The physical submission of Selma's body leads to a psychological submission marked by silence and terror. The memory of the initial rape is imprinted on her mind to such an extent, that she has become fearful of being around wells (Inso, 90). Furthermore, when
her brother, on a rare visit, comes up behind her near the well where she was raped, the narrator states that:

Elle s'était rappelé le jour...Elle était prête à se jeter dans le puits (Inso, 89-90)

Her fear of Siomar encompasses her, and it is only when he is away from the house that Selma demonstrates a glimmer of life (Inso, 142).

Apart from being physically and emotionally shattered, Selma is consumed by moral guilt arising from traditional religious beliefs. The narrator explains that Selma lives with:

un sentiment de culpabilité qu’elle avait tissé peu à peu depuis le jour où elle avait été violée... (Inso, 208)

This guilt is rooted in her shame at being in a situation which is prohibited by religion on the two levels that we have already discussed. The narrator states: “Ma mère avait peur de l’enfer...” (Inso, 209). It is ironic that she, the victim, feels guilty and is fearful of the final consequences proscribed by religion, whereas, the victimizer, a hadji, is labeled ‘le diable’ (Inso, 110) and demonstrates no remorse. In such a social situation, Selma’s choices as a woman are limited and the narrator outlines her options: “Entre la douleur et la mort, que choisir?” (Inso, 206).

Often suicidal and emotionally spent, Selma becomes insane. Her hallucinations become the only way of leaving a painful reality over which she has no control. In this polygynous social space both female characters, Selma and
Malika, are destroyed. Malika, the legal wife, is repudiated, that is rejected, by her husband the second day of her marriage, only to see her younger sister become the ‘favorite’. Both women keep this illicit relationship a secret, becoming, inadvertently, silent accomplices. Their acquiescence, on the one hand, destroys Selma completely, her body becomes the object of Siomar’s sexual fantasies and her mind is crushed by guilt and silence.

On the other hand, Malika becomes the silent repudiated wife, ever suffering and resentful of her displaced social position. Malika may have been saved from the insanity her sister has plunged into, by the sole fact of being the legal, although rejected, wife of Siomar. Malika occupies a more elevated position in the social hierarchy than Selma. Her salvation may be in her honor as a suffering wife, and in her decision to recount their story. The silence of these two women, broken only when Selma is close to death, provokes incredulity on the part of the narrator, who states:

J’étais moins étonné que révolté du silence des deux femmes qui avaient gardé du silence pendant une vingtaine d’années (Inso, 88)

Examined within the context of the narrative social space they occupy, the silence of these female characters is understandable. Bearing in mind the fact that a female is always under the tutelage of a male, these two women are under the care, legitimate or otherwise, of Siomar. To protest their present social condition would require moral, financial and
social support from without the polygynous space, and would have to be that of a father or a brother. Selma and Malika’s father died a disreputable death (Inso, 84) and the errant brother (Inso, 88), an alcoholic like the father, cannot provide any support. Due to this lack of male support and the conspiracy of the villagers who are all employed by Siomar, these female characters endure humiliation and subjugation. One may, of course, speculate what use any male support would have been in this situation marked by patriarchal power and female submission. The adult male narrator, Selma’s son, although recounting the tragedy of his mother’s life, provides neither support nor understanding.

In some of the literary discourses we have analyzed, the character of the father regularly frequents prostitutes or 'mistresses'. These women are mentioned briefly and casually by the narrators of La répudiation and Messaouda¹⁴. In fact their casual reference is an indication to the reader of their level of acceptance and the 'normality' of their social existence. It is to be noted that where unsanctioned relationships are discussed, sexual fidelity is an unmentioned issue. In the discourses under discussion, the sexual fidelity of the wife is demanded and guarded, whereas the reverse is true for the husband. His sexual fidelity is never a point of discussion due to the fact that male prowess is valued more

¹⁴ The father, Le Seigneur, in Chraïbi’s Le passé simple also mentions prostitutes or mistresses that he frequented during his travels (241-242).
than faithfulness to a sexual partner. Such is the case of the father, Si Zoubir, in La Répudiation, who is defined as a ‘mâle effréné’ (Rép, 37) and regularly frequents three mistresses or prostitutes. The wife and sons are aware of Si Zoubir’s infidelities, in fact the son-narrator referring to the mother states:

Elle [Ma] était au courant des maîtresses, mais trouvait normal qu’un homme pût tromper sa femme (Rép, 60)

These mistresses never participate in the conjugal space of the male who frequents them, nor are they accommodated in any way within a sanctioned marital space. No physical descriptions are offered of these woman, and the narrator elaborates on the background of only Mimi, who is:

... l’une des maîtresses de mon père, une ancienne recrue des bordels de Constantine (Rép, 66)

Beyond the sexual services these ‘mistresses’ provide their social role is limited, if not non-existent. The prostitute may be considered a ‘necessary evil’, essential for the satisfaction of male sexual desires, evil because she disrupts the socio-religious organization that condemns illicit sexual activity. In the narrative discourses analyzed in this study, the specific social status of the prostitute denies her an identity as an individual. She is the generic female body whose existence depends on the male exploitation of that body. To a large extent her physical appearance, her mind, and her emotions are negligible elements in the satisfaction of male
fantasy. The function of the prostitute as a repository of male fantasies is essential for her existence within the ummah. Determined by procreation, legitimate marital sexual relations involve precisely defined individuals and portend socio-religious duties. However, the illicit sexual act performed with an undistinguished 'female body', is the space where the male can express his fantasies. The non-identity and non-identification of the prostitute is vividly expressed by the father in Messaouda.

The narrator's father regularly visits prostitutes who are described by the narrator as "jambes anonymes" (Messa, 164). This anonymity is expressed clearly when the father visits Daouya, a young woman forced into prostitution by her family. While Daouya's mother prepares tea for the habitual clients, her younger brother, Toto, collects the money, on which the family's economic survival depends. Toto while describing one such visit, speaks to the narrator of a peculiar action; he says:

-... Il [ton père] avait caché le visage de Daouya avec une serviette. (Messa, 164)

This action precisely defines the significance of the prostitute whose covered face deprives her of all identity and transforms her into 'the female body'. A body without a face, which could belong to any woman or to many women is, obviously, what the male is seeking. By objectifying the female body in this manner, the male possesses a non-identifiable space on
which he can build his fantasies and thus satisfy his sexual desires or perversions.

Within the ummah created in literary discourse, the prostitute functions as a substitute sexual partner who, for the male, is an entity that complements the wife. On the one hand, the wife, who is the religiously sanctioned and officially contracted sexual partner signifies purity and is identified by her procreative abilities. On the other hand, the prostitute is the socio-religiously condemned sexual partner, signifying illicit pleasure and moral transgression.

Accepting the identity of the body that provides pleasure would not only grant that being social status, but would also, by identifying the unlawful act, implicate the male. Consequently, the veiled face of the prostitute is not unlike a body with a severed head, permitting the male to ignore the moral implications of any sexual act with this body. Transformed in this manner the female body is a ‘thing’ with a specific function that is bought for a small sum of money; its lack of subjective existence is at the core of social justification and acceptance of prostitutes.

To conclude this discussion on polygynous space, we will comment on the character of the polygynist male. The question that is raised often is why a male may desire more than one sexual partner, legal or otherwise. By examining some of the male characters in the literary narratives we have discussed in
this and the previous chapters, we will consider the motivations that lie behind the creation of polygynous spaces.

If all the male characters are examined, we may put El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye in Xala at one pole, because the polygynous space created by him is legal, and within all prescribed limits, social, cultural and religious. He is the only character who makes any attempt, however unsuccessful or lacking in will, at establishing equality between his wives. At the other end of the spectrum, complete sexual licentiousness is represented by the character of the father in Messaouda.

Within the legal polygynous space of Xala, the three wives of El Hadji are representations of his wealth and social status, because it is only a wealthy man who can afford to economically support three wives. El Hadji considers his third marriage to be a 'promotion' and one which "le hissait au rang de la notabilité traditionelle"15 (Xala, 12). From this, we may conclude that bigamy is a common occurrence in El Hadji's social space, whereas this third union places him in a socially distinct category he would not be able to achieve otherwise. El Hadji is also proud that he is able, at his age, to "get" such a young woman to be his wife. Tired of his other wives, and in search of someone to excite him, El Hadji reflects

15 In the context of Senegalese society, the elevation in social status that is acquired following a re-marriage has particular social significance due to certain cultural traditions as well as the caste system.
Ramatoulaye comments on the social condition of the wife who is exchanged like a used, old boubou (Lettre, 62):

N’Goné, il faut bien le dire, avait la saveur d’un fruit, que ses femmes avaient perdue depuis longtemps. La chair ferme, lisse, l’haleine fraîche (Xala, 18)

His gratified male ego considers N’Goné to be a youthful body to be possessed and displayed, as one might a trophy. The objectification of N’Goné and El Hadji’s mentality as well as that of his businessmen friends is clearly demonstrated during the wedding dinner when they joke about his third marriage. Their conversation includes uncouth comments such as that of the president of the Chamber of Commerce and a member of the National Assembly, who, addressing El Hadji, say:

- Tu te retires? Va consommer ta vierge, ...
  “Chers Collègues, notre frère El Hadji, dans un moment, va ‘percer’ sa donzelle...

- Œuvre délicate...crois-le, nous sommes prêts à te porter secours” (Xala, 42)

The agreeable response to the crude banter of his colleagues, indicates El Hadji’s complicity in reducing the female body to an object that demands possession. Implying, as well, that the lack of previous possession, the virginity of the woman, makes this initial possession all the more valuable. This ‘men’s locker room’ talk of a youthful virgin is also a means through which these middle-aged male characters try to regain their lost youth.

One situation between the two extreme poles of polygynous behavior may be the situation of le Seigneur. In Le passé
simple, the legal wife of le Seigneur has to fulfill a socio-religious function. The wife, in her submission and obedience, represents the reproductive sexual act (Passé, 248) which he considered devoid of love:

L’amour. Qui faisait défaut dans mon union bénie par la Loi... Je ne pouvais pas l’aime. J’en ai aimé d’autres (Passé, 249)

In these statements made by le Seigneur, we notice the lack of concern for the wife as well as an overwhelming concern for himself and his ideas about love. One may wonder what the word ‘aimer’ represents since it excludes, as we have discussed, any feelings of sympathy or any act of kindness towards his wife, his concubine, Aïcha, or his children.

One could state that the masculine mentality exhibited by these characters who have re-married or have concubines is quite similar, if not identical to that of the father figure in Messaouda. The extreme callousness of the father is demonstrated by his dearth of feelings towards and by the treatment of his wife. Not only does he bring women home whom the mother has to serve (Messa, 53), but eventually abandons his family for the pursuit of sexual pleasure and perversion. The narrator/son describes the father’s movements:

il [le père] liquida ses biens, quitta la terre et les siens et s’enfuit, à la poursuite du rêve et de la folie, s’installer à El Hajeb... renommé pour ses filles de joie (Messa, 121)

With these two opposite poles, and many variations in between we can summarize the attitude of the character of the husband towards the creation of a polygynous space. The
motivations of the husband, which are many, are summarized in El Hadji’s reflections concerning his third marriage:

Avait-il aimé? Ou la vieillesse l’avait-elle poussé vers la chair plus fraîche? Ou parce-que il était riche? Faiblesses? Libertinage? Epicurisme?... (Xala, 68)

Within the context of a narrative social space, the status of the female may vary depending on the type of polygynous space she occupies, or where she is positioned within a particular polygynous space, the husband perceives her as only one thing, a vehicle with two distinct purposes. He has created, with the indifference or the silent approval of the larger social space, only two types of conjugal spaces for her to occupy. These spaces may be created and transformed depending on his needs and desires. The first space is that of obligation and restraint, underlined by his religious obligation to marry and procreate, and the second is that of personal physical pleasure. Within the first space, procreation takes precedence over pleasure. The male performs his duty and the woman is elevated to the status of mother. Meanwhile, the second space allows for abandonment of duty for the pursuit of pure pleasure. Relieved from socio-religious obligation, the male can unleash his fantasies, one obvious consequence of which is the social degradation and dishonor of the woman. In both situations, the woman’s spirit is crushed and her body is a medium through which the male obtains what he craves, irrespective of her desires and often in violation of religious and moral dictates.
CHAPTER VI

THE MARGINALIZED SOLITARY FEMALE

In the preceding chapters we have dealt exclusively with female characters who, abiding by the prevalent socio-cultural norms, occupy the traditional domestic space. Additionally, we have briefly discussed the status of the wife who leaves her marital space, Oumi N’Doye in Xala, and the body of the prostitute as a space for the expression of sexual desire in Messaouda. Whether within or without of the boundaries of traditional marital spaces, the existence of the female character is continually defined by her relationship not only to men but to the other females in the domestic space.

In this chapter, it is our intention to discuss with more depth the social status of the single woman in narrative discourse. The term single woman can be defined as the female who is not attached by a marital contract to a male. Whatever the circumstances of this ‘non-attached’ condition, the single female often finds herself outside the traditional boundaries of female movement. We further wish to make a distinction between a young single girl/woman, such as Fatiha, who is under the protection of her father and the older unattached female whose existential situation and social circumstances create distinct social situations in narrative discourse. With respect to the production of patriarchal and oppressive social
spaces in literature, it is the character of the older single female that is of primary interest.

Within the socio-cultural and religious hierarchy established by Fatna Aït Sabbah and defined in Chapter I, the female being has, by the creation of a rigid socio-religious structuring, been placed at a level where she is spiritually, intellectually and economically inferior to the male. If we examine this hierarchy further by isolating and dividing the grouping 'female', we obtain a classification dependent on female social status within the original broader hierarchy of Allah-male-female-child.

The categorizing that occurs on the female level of the hierarchy is entirely dependent on how the behavior of the female is perceived or evaluated by the dominant socio-cultural group. As we have demonstrated in the previous chapters, if the female is obedient to the established male dominated system, and remains within her marital space then she is honored and receives an appropriate social label which is entirely dependent on her status.

For example, a reproducing female who has given birth to children, particularly to male children, will be honored as a mother. The honor she receives is, without a doubt, on the condition that she is married and occupies her designated marital space. Satisfying these conditions, we can state that in a society based on Islamic doctrine, the status 'married mother', defined by the female capacity of procreation, is
recognized as the 'most honored'. Within this category, which also includes socially acceptable label modifications such as 'widowed mother', the female receives the appropriate label of a respected socialized female being.

At a level below the "married mother", exists the female who is labeled "married woman", and is defined and protected by the boundaries of her marital space. At the third level, and still within the domestic space, resides the "young female", whose status depends on her virginity and who is protected by the male members of her family. Additionally, this level is also occupied by the woman who is alone due to abandonment but is protected or under the care of her own family.

The women at these three levels of existence are the guardians of family honor and their existence is limited by their relationship to a male. Defined by one or more of the following labels: "mother of ...", "wife of ...", "daughter of ..." and "sister of ...", their existential condition is defined by submission and powerlessness, while their potential fitna is neutralized under strict male surveillance.

At the last and the lowest rung of the female hierarchy is the single woman who is without any male protection. This phenomenon is quite rare in a society where the collective conscience condemns the unprotected single woman. The condition of being unprotected results in her being labeled dangerous due to the lack of male control of her sexuality:

La femme seule... représente un danger constant. Une femme seule sans protecteur est facilement
This precisely organized community is under the constant threat of the unprotected female being, who is, by definition, a fitna. When unleashed, this fitna can disrupt the established social structure and the smooth functioning of the community. By not being under the protection of any one male, the single female becomes the property of the entire male society, which continues to limit her existence.

This hierarchy based on the characteristics described above socially organizes the female being in the following way:

the married/widowed mother

the married woman

the protected unmarried girl/ single woman

the unprotected single woman

Figure 6.1 - A Female Social Hierarchy

With distinct degrees or levels of "un-protection", various single female characters are represented in narrative discourse. In the first part of this chapter, we will examine the status of three female characters, Yaye Bineta in Xala, Yacine in Maimouna and La Porteuse d'eau in Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement who are, in different ways, isolated from the traditional domestic space. Either alienated from, or existing at the boundaries of the domestic and marital space of other

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1 Fahmy 93.

females, their role in society is of the marginalized woman who serves the non-marginalized women. Condemned to an existence which is socially and economically lower to that of other females, these women are usually negatively characterized in narrative discourse.

In the second section of this chapter, we will examine the social situation and existence of the female character Messaouda in *Messaouda*. The status of Messaouda is unique in that she represents the absolute bottom rung of the female hierarchy described above. Messaouda, an unprotected black female, residing in a traditional Moroccan narrative space, typifies *fitna* - temptress and sexual object -, and is the source of male sexual and mental agitation. In studying the character of Messaouda, we will concentrate not only on the aspect of female *fitna*, but also on the traditional and socio-religious dichotomy that exists between black and white in an Islamic as well as a traditional Moroccan context.

**Solitude and suffering**

Yaye Bineta, a widow, is the aunt of the third wife of El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye, and lives with her brother and his family. A protected single woman, she also possesses the title of "La Badiène" which socially places her at the rank of a husband (*Xala*, 14). Her determination and strength have made this marriage possible, and as the organizer of the wedding, she is referred to as "la maîtresse de la cérémonie" (*Xala*, 14).
Occupying a position of status in her brother’s family, she is portrayed as the strong, aggressive and dominant decision-maker. These masculine traits, which we assume are applied to a middle-aged widow, grant her an honored status that is usually reserved for men. Equal to the adult male members of her family, she moves with freedom in the public space and communicates directly and confidently with men. This equality which she expresses in both action and speech renders her a threat to the established social order. Neither afraid of nor submissive to men, her self-assurance is a fitna. Consequently, Yaye Bineta’s position of respect is restricted to her immediate and familial domestic space, while socially she is condemned, the honor being replaced by superstitious fear.

Widowed twice, it is claimed that she is cursed because her husbands died. However, the unstated question behind the fear is whether they died a natural death. As a result of this unknown, she is assumed guilty and acquires the label of ‘la dévoreuse d’hommes’ (Xala, 54). This fitna, having ‘killed’ her husbands, is avoided by all, men fear her and women do not wish to be associated with her:

Aucun homme ne se présenta de crainte d’être la prochaine proie. ... incarnation d’une mort anticipée, les hommes la fuyaient et les femmes mariées de son âge, préféraient divorcer plutôt que d’être veuves à ses cotés. (Xala, 54)

This preference for the lower and less respected social status of divorced woman, instead of being equated with Yaye Bineta,
indicates the extent of communal disdain and social rejection faced by Yaye Bineta. All hope of another marriage or relationship having been destroyed, Yaye Bineta attempts, to the disgust of El Hadji (Xala, 91, 94), to live a married life by proxy, through her niece. This is indicated in three different ways. First, the narrator states:

_Le mariage de la fille de son frère était son mariage_ (Xala, 55)

Furthermore, Awa Adja Astou, speaking of the rivalry that exists between co-wives, informs Oumi N'Doye that she should consider herself to be in competition not with N'Goné, but with Yaye Bineta for El Hadji's favors (Xala, 36). Lastly, Yaye Bineta, when referring to N'Goné's _moomé_ or allotted conjugal days, declares to El Hadji: "Nous attendons avec impatience notre moomé." (Xala, 93). The choice of subject noun and possessive pronoun indicates that her social status has been reduced to that of a forced voyeur, living her own dreams of a conjugal relationship through a young woman.

Despised by El Hadji for her aggressive and imposing personality, condemned by society for her unfortunate life, Yaye Bineta is further denigrated by two descriptions that reduced her to the state of a preying arachnid and an insect. Faithful to the image of a malicious widow, she is compared to a spider, one could elaborate and state, a black widow spider which devours its mate. Her efforts at arranging N'Goné's wedding are belittled with the repetition of the image of a spider: "Telle une araignée, labourieusement, La Badiène
tissait la toile" (Xala, 19). Not content with this analogy of a spider planning to catch and devour its prey, the second comparison, evoked by El Hadji's chauffeur, is that of a termite:

Cette femme [Yaye Bineta] lui rappelait une tante surnommée "la termite" tant elle corrodait l'intérieur des gens, ne laissant que la forme de ses victimes. (Xala, 156)

This second comparison brings forth two implications, the first one being of termites that destroy the foundations of a house. Yaye Bineta like a termite is accused of eating away and destroying El Hadji's home and 'peaceful' existence with his two wives and their families. Additionally, she is accused, not unlike both termites and spiders, of sucking the life out of El Hadji. The insinuation, of course, being that it is because of her manipulative behavior that El Hadji is impotent. The essence of the male having been preyed upon, just the physical form or shell of the man remains.

Yaye Bineta is an example of how social-cultural prejudices and superstitions can create an unsympathetic being whose characteristics are evaluated differently within different social spaces. Her suffering remains unvoiced while she is socially ostracized and constantly labeled by others. The power granted by her status within the domestic space is worthless within the public domain where men and women alike condemn her.

Although she occupies a different social space than that of Yaye Bineta, Yacine also commands a certain degree of
respect. While Yaye Bineta resides in her family’s domestic space, Yacine lives in the domestic space of strangers. As a servile and obedient older servant of the house, she has earned the title “la Responsable” (Maïmouna, 90). The silent and efficient confidante of Rihanna, the mistress of the house, Yacine has not forgotten the loss of her child and the desertion of her lover, which have reduced her to the status of servant.

Her bitterness and loneliness resurface with the arrival of Maïmouna, whose youthful exuberance remind Yacine of her lost youth. Additionally, Maïmouna is perceived as the intruder in the relationship that had been established between Rihanna and Yacine:

Maïmouna était venue s’interposer dans l’intimité étroite des deux femmes. Rihanna ne marquait plus à Yacine ces petites attentions qui la rendaient si fière et faisaient d’elle sa complice de tous les instants. ... Yacine souffrait de sentir qu’elle n’était qu’une bonne... (Maï, 130-31)

The emotional bonds that she should have had with her lover have been replaced by her relationship to Rihanna. Yacine is transformed from a servile single woman to a jealous and vengeful traitor when this relationship is threatened. Aware of this jealousy, a marabout gives the following warning concerning Yacine:

Dis-lui [à Rihanna] de se méfier d’une femme qui vit très près de Maïmouna... elle connaît déjà la vie et ce qu’elle en sait n’est pas recommandable. Elle est d’autant plus dangereuse pour Maïmouna qu’elle est effacée... (Maï, 116)
The source of suffering as well as the destroyer of Maïmouna and her family’s happiness, Yacine is further defined as "la femme dangereuse, la femme fatale" (Maï, 118). Analyzing these comments and labeling, we can state that one of the basic assumptions that is made is that a single woman cannot overcome the bitterness and accompanying resentment of being without a man and male protection. In this respect, her mental and emotional condition will always be linked to her relationship with a male, regardless of the extent of her mistreatment.

Furthermore, the single woman, however submissive she may appear to be, is deceitful and will cunningly destroy whatever or whomever threatens her own relationships. Her callous and conniving destruction of Maïmouna demonstrates a lack of both sympathy and empathy. This destructive nature makes Yacine a fitna which moves from one domestic space to another, creating havoc in its wake. If Yaye Bineta is the spider and the termite then Yacine, by her behavior, can be compared to a snake that slithers its way in to people’s lives and silently consumes the happiness of others.

Due to the fact that Yacine does not occupy her own space, she is completely dependent on the labeling of others. She is described as having no control over her actions or her existence. Everything has been predetermined by her original personal relationship, which has reduced her to an existence at the periphery of all domestic spaces and a life of servitude.
La Porteuse d’eau, unnamed but for “Fatma”, often used as a generic name for female servants, is defined by her profession as a water carrier in a hammam. Old, injured and under sedation, she voices a personal suffering which is the source of her present solitude. The effects of the medication, one would assume, assist in releasing the burden of her solitary existence. Sold by her soldier father for a couple of beers to another soldier, La Porteuse defines her former existence as being one of silence and imprisonment, she labels herself, “l’Exclue ...” (Femmes d’Alger, 53).

A child bride exiled from her domestic space to an oppressive marital space, she now relives her torment, questioning her passive existence and defining herself by the actions that others took, and the treatment others meted out to her:

C’est moi? - moi - C’est moi qu’ils ont exclue, moi sur laquelle ils ont lancé l’interdit
C’est moi - moi? - moi qu’ils ont humiliée
Moi qu’ils ont encagée
Moi qu’ils ont cherché à ployer ... Moi, c’est moi qu’ils ont voulu étouffer
(Femmes d’Alger, 54)

Escaping her marital space, she not only literally, but symbolically unveils her body. Without the physical veil of a piece of cloth and the symbolic veil of the boundaries of her marital space, she is alone, unprotected and exposed in the public domain. The only shelter she finds is in a brothel which she defines as:

un havre, non, un lieu de travail... J’ai
des clients. Cinq ans, dix ans, les années coulent. (Femmes d’Alger, 59)

A female without appropriate male protection is reduced, within the public space, to a body that is used for male sexual pleasure. Objectified, she is once again defined by those who possess her and her ‘illicit’ profession as temptress renders her a fitna. A prostitute or a water carrier, she is always at the service of others, whose demands, whatever their nature, must be fulfilled.

Her subconscious questioning, in this state of sedation, is an attempt at self definition which she expresses as:

... la porteuse d’eau créant mon espace
neuf ...

Crushed, both mentally, emotionally and physically by the vagaries of men who have defined and labeled her existence, she searches in vain to find new boundaries as well as new definitions for herself. However, the misery of La Porteuse’s existence in a social space where she is powerless is apparent, when she defines herself by her exclusion from the traditional socio-religious boundaries. She concludes:

Je suis - qui suis-je? - je suis
l’exclue ...

One can state that a single unprotected female, irrespective of the social situation of her family, will always, due to her solitary existence and lack of male supervision, be excluded from social spaces of honor. Her definition and placement at the lowest level of female existence is so rigid and narrow that she is not given the
opportunity to re-define herself without the appropriate male support.

The demeaning of Messaouda

Before we can proceed with an analysis of the character of Messaouda, it is imperative to return to the modifications of the original socio-religious hierarchy which were indicated at the beginning of this chapter. We shall adapt the female hierarchy further by first examining the significance of race and color in the domain of the sacred, and secondly by examining some Moroccan proverbs that make moral distinctions between people of different skin color. While proclaiming the absolute equality of the pious, irrespective of their race or color, Islamic doctrine still makes a distinction between black and white. The Qur'ân, mentioning the final Judgment, proclaims:

Au jour où certains visages s'éclairent,
et que d'autres visages s'assombriront. A
ceux dont les visages seront assombris (il
sera dit): "Avez-vous mécré après avoir eu
la foi?" En bien goûtez au châtiment, pour
avoir renié la foi.
Et quant à ceux dont les visages s'éclairent,
ils seront dans la miséricorde d'Allah, où ils
demeureront éternellement.

يوم تبيض وجهة وتسود وجهة فأما الذين اسودت وجههم
أكفرتم بعد إيمانكم فذوقوا العذاب بما كنتتم تكفرون - وأما
الذين ابيضت وجههم ففي رحمة الله هم فيها خلدون -

3 Le Saint Coran, Surah al-Imran (3): 106-107. In the English
translation we refer to, the words "black" and "white" have been used.
Verse 106 of the same Surah begins by stating:
It is important to note that aswad (اسود), the word used in the Arabic text for the color black has the verbal root SWD (سود), derivatives of which imply not only "to blacken, to make black", but also "to disgrace, dishonor someone"\(^4\). Similarly, abyad (ابيض), derived from the verbal root BYD (بيض) means the color white, and the "white race". Additionally, it signifies the following qualities: "blameless, noble, sincere"\(^5\). The polysemy of these Arabic words clearly demonstrates the conscious link that exists between the color and its moral implications, confirming the Qur'anic analogy.

Even if this divine comparison exists for most Muslims at a symbolic level, one can still state that these verses establish a concrete reference between skin color and divine benediction. This analogy confirms that the color white signifies all that is good, honorable and pure, whereas the color black, inciting divine wrath, is a symbol of evil and sin. Furthermore, it is important to note that this fundamental analogy, established by the Qur'ân, is based on more archaic but systematically reproduced and repeated associations between color and moral and emotional qualities. These associations are prevalent in the folklore, literature and popular culture of most societies.

\[^4\] Cowan, ed., 440.

\[^5\] Cowan, ed., 86.
For our study of Messaouda, it is also important to note that this association between black and the illicit, and white and purity is expressed in the Moroccan collective consciousness through the production of proverbs. One such proverb states:

Black is the color of darkness and gloom and white is the color of light and brightness, and is therefore regarded as a good fäl. [The] color black is by itself a bad omen and a source of evil.6

This analogy is extended from the color black to include people of dark skin color:

Black people are regarded as unlucky... misfortune was sure to befall if [one] meets a black man. Black people are ill-omened.7

In a Muslim socio-cultural space, this dichotomy between black and white is easily extended into daily life and applied to women. In general, one can state that in many cultures, female beauty and ugliness are often evaluated on the basis of skin color. Black and white being important social factors, females with lighter skin color have greater social value and are more sought after for their 'attractiveness'.

Consequently, when placing a woman in the appropriate category of the female hierarchy established earlier, her color becomes a determining factor. Therefore, at each level of the


7 Westermarck, *Ritual* 15.
hierarchy, one can add a sub-division for the black woman, that is, in the category of mother there should be two levels, the more esteemed level for the 'white mother' and the lower lever for the 'black mother'. In this dichotomized version, the black/white split is present at every level of the hierarchy. The lowest rung would then belong to the unprotected female whose solitary existence is neither respected nor honored by the community and whose color is black:

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{the unprotected woman} \\
\hline
\text{white} \\
\hline
\text{black}
\end{array} \]

The importance of this hierarchization which includes the black/white dichotomy, will be apparent when we discuss the social status of Messaouda in the physical and social narrative space which represents a Moroccan village.

Searching the narrative discourse for a physical description of Messaouda, one notices the lack of physical details, such as the shape or color of her eyes. On the contrary, it appears that a deliberate attempt has been made to give an imprecise, ambiguous depiction. The narrator presents the following description:

Deux lignes parallèles mal tracées, une ligne transparente et puis un cercle noir mal fermé avec quelques taches incertaines. (Messa, 11)

The only evident detail in this portrait is Messaouda's color. Her black skin is further emphasized in references such as "l'androgyne noir", who also has a "rire noir" (Messa, 14). Evoking images of obscure darkness and flesh, the narrator
suggests a physical body, dark skin color, and the sexual organs of an objectified female being. The ambiguous descriptions of Messaouda proffered by the adolescent narrator question her gender and the nature of her being:

Messaouda une femme. Messaouda un homme. Messaouda un animal. Elle était tout cela à la fois; hermaphrodite solitaire... (Messa, 11)

Messaouda is a hermaphrodite, but not in the biological sense because her sexual organs are over emphasized throughout the narrative. One is made aware of the fact that Messaouda is a woman, due to the distinct portrayal of two female traits, the breasts and the vagina. These two body parts, exaggerated in proportion, are constantly referred to by males obsessed with Messaouda’s libido.

The nature of her existence is questioned because Messaouda does not belong, like all the other women in the narrative, to the traditional domestic space. Her animal definition can perhaps be explained by her freedom of movement and her imagined unrestrained sexuality. Additionally, Messaouda’s being is perceived as being dominated by the most instinctive and fundamental needs and desires, hence the association with an ‘animal like’ existence. She, however, becomes the object of these very same ‘basic’ desires expressed by the male members of the village, who subject her to their will. Messaouda’s apparent sexuality, which is labeled as being depraved stands in contrast to the negligible and repressed sexuality of the married females characters.
Messaouda is also 'a man' because she is relatively independent, moving freely without the traditional requirement of male permission or accompaniment.

Described vaguely as a black mass, but with a distinct sexuality, Messaouda social position in the village is unique. Male obsession with Messaouda's supposed libidinous nature as well as the emphasis of her racial characteristics are a stereotypical repetition of the image of black women, and more generally of all blacks, which has existed since the age of slavery, and dates, in the Arab world, to the Jahiliya:

Le comportement amoureux des Noirs a été un sujet d'intense curiosité. On en trouve l'écho dans la poésie et la littérature arabes anciennes... on attribue aux Noirs d'extraordinaires prouesses sexuelles et une sexualité sans retenue. ... Les femmes noires étaient gratifiées d'un sex-appeal et d'un appétit sexuel insatiable.8

The descriptions of Messaouda appear to be reproductions of the images of black women which have existed in the Arab subconscious for centuries. Additionally, black women were depicted as being:

à la fois comme physiquement répugnantes et sexuellement attirantes.9

Objectified in a similar manner, Messaouda is equally desired and despised by the lecherous males of her small community. The sexual objectification of Messaouda, the black woman, is evident in the descriptions of her vagina, which is not only


9 Murray 107.
"le trou saveur" (Messa, 25) but also takes on, in the fantasy of the narrator, a gigantic form resembling a "sexe-caverne" (Messa, 29). Not unlike a devouring organ, these images of Messaouda's sexual organ correspond to depictions of black women in Arabic literature. An example of this is the image presented by the Arab poet Farazdaq, who, in the eighth century AD, stated:

Combien de tendres filles des Zanj possèdent un four brûlant aussi large qu'un bol pour boire.\(^1\)

The persistent, stereotypical description of a libidinous black woman who is repulsive, attractive and dangerous, has become engrained in the collective social consciousness.

The depiction of a black woman which corresponds to that of Messaouda in narrative discourse, exists also in Moroccan folklore, and is called Aischa Kandischa. Aischa Kandischa is described as a beautiful woman who has "des longs seins pendants et des signes d'animalité"\(^1\). Gifted in the art of seduction, Aicha Kandischa is also described as a dangerous woman. Known also by the name 'Haraja', Moroccan superstition attributes her with the power to change and appear in different forms. According to folklore, Haraja, who is black and dominated by her sexuality, can appear in the shape of an

\(^{10}\) Quoted by Murray in L'esclavage 107. 'Zanj' is another Arabic name for Africa. Refer also to Bernard Lewis, Race and Slavery in the Middle East (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

\(^{11}\) Lacoste-Dujardin, Des mères 169.
animal\textsuperscript{12}. Another version of Aischa Kandischa and Haraja is `Gola' a \textit{jenniya}\textsuperscript{13} who appears as:

\begin{quote}
\begin{itemize}
\item a black woman with long projecting canine teeth and pendant breasts...
\item who lives in desolate places.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{itemize}
\end{quote}

It is apparent that Messaouda, a mixture of all the above variations, is confined by the stereotypical images of a black woman, the label of \textit{fitna} given by Islamic ideology as well as the folkloric portraits of the temptress/destructive female.

Furthermore, in contrast to the other female characters in the narrative discourse of \textit{Messaouda}, Messaouda has neither a male protector nor a roof over her head. Not a guardian of anyone's honor or familial respect, no mention is made in the text of Messaouda's lineage. In the case of Messaouda, none of the traditional labels that associate a female with a male are applicable. Being neither, 'daughter of ...', 'wife of ...', 'mother of ...', 'nor sister of ...', Messaouda leads a solitary and lonely existence.

The physical space she occupies is extensive and she roams the village streets without reproach or interdiction. In fact, one can state that all the overlapping spaces of the village

\textsuperscript{12} Westermarck, \textit{Ritual} 393.

\textsuperscript{13} A \textit{jenniya} as defined by Westermarck is "the personification of what is uncanny in nature" but in the context of Islamic demonology, a \textit{jenniya} is the female form of a \textit{djinn}, a being of fire created by \textit{Allah} and living on this earth. \textit{Djinns} can be either morally good or evil and are invisible to the human eye, but can manifest themselves in human shape at will.

\textsuperscript{14} Westermarck, \textit{Ritual} 396-398.
are her domain. Even the protective walls which keep the other women inside the domestic space cannot keep her out:

Messaouda entrait dans toutes les maisons, mais aucune maison ne lui appartenait. (Messa, 12)

It is obvious from these comments that Messaouda does not possess a personal and private space, which one commonly refers to as ‘home’. Without the security, warmth and protection that a home signifies, Messaouda is reduced to wandering from one home to another at the invitation of the men who exploit and subjugate her.

The lack of boundary walls that define the female domestic space, confining the women of the village does, at a superficial level, indicate a freedom denied the others. To the contrary, it is because of the lack of protection and boundaries that Messaouda becomes the possession of all the men of the village. Indeed, the men perceive Messaouda as a woman who is sexually available because of this lack of protection. The open physical space and the liberty of movement do not assist in breaking the traditional pejorative stereotype of an unprotected single woman. In fact, the narrator understands that this assumed liberty is more confining in its degradation than the boundaries of the domestic space:

On plaçait alors le corps de Messaouda dans une cellule (Messa, 17)

Imprisoned by the avid male look as well as the socio-cultural definitions of who and what a single woman is, Messaouda’s existence is narrowly defined by the community.
An unrestrained *fitna*, her being is reduced to a sexual object and she becomes a play-thing for the men to constantly abuse. Common property, her body arouses male desire and she is defined by the men who are obsessed only with her sexual organs:

ils exprimaient en elle l’ivresse de leur déplorable délire: des hommes incapables de contrôler l’éclat de leur euphorie. (*Messa*, 11)

*Messaouda* is objectified to such an extent that the villagers cease to regard her as a thinking and feeling human being. The entire village partakes in her degradation either as observers or as abusers. The narrator, an interested bystander, describes a detestable and atrocious scene in which sadistic pleasure is derived by teasing and torturing *Messaouda*:

Parfois les adultes s’amusaient à la dénuder ou à lui arracher les poils du bas-ventre pour la mettre hors d’elle et ils réussissaient à lui soutirer les hurlements. Elle s’enfuyait alors en pleurant, poursuivie par les doigts poilus et le rire complice de nos aînés. (*Messa*, 12)

Insensitive to her needs and feelings, the complicity of the villagers is an essential factor that permits these street orgies (*Messa*, 18) of sexual depravity and forbidden pleasure to take place. A suffering, powerless victim, *Messaouda* is defined as “*la plaie du désir collectif*” (*Messa*, 13).

Inasmuch as the socio-religious hierarchy places *Messaouda* at the very bottom rung of the social structure, she is without respect and honor. In fact the collective attitude of the villagers, reflected both by their physical actions and their
social conditioning, prevents Messaouda from even attempting to modify her present situation to one which could be more honored and respected. An unwilling, silent and submissive participant, Messaouda is “l’offrande” (Messa, 13), a sacrificial animal offered at the alter of a collective and prevalent perversity. Her unprotected status results in Messaouda being labeled a temptation, a sexual fitna, which disrupts the efficient functioning of the public social space.

However, it is not just her unprotected social status but also the color of her skin that plays a fundamental role in her definition as an object of sexual pleasure. Another essential factor that is critical in the degradation process of the single female, is male hypocrisy. Male two-facedness towards human sexuality condemns the female for her sexuality but uses her as an object for male sexual satisfaction.

In societies where female sexuality is controlled and protected by the male members of a family, a single woman is always associated with sexual liberty and her presumed availability is equated with prostitution. This attitude is reflected in comments made by the narrator about the sexuality of his mother, Mi, a repressed and submissive woman bound by socio-cultural traditions:

Mi avait le droit de se taire et de subir la pénétration. Comme toutes les femmes, elle n’avait pas le droit à la jouissance sexuelle. Mi était une femme chaste et vertueuse, non une prostituée. (Messa, 22)
This single woman, who is equated to a 'prostitute' is considered more libidinous and uninhibited if she is black. Engrained during the era of slavery, the image of a socially powerless black female slave as the provider of sexual pleasure is repeated in some narrative discourses15.

As we mentioned in Chapter V, the father of the narrator in Messaouda regards, Daouya, the prostitute he frequents as an object-body to be exploited for his pleasure. Daouya by having her face covered becomes just as physically ambiguous as the perception of Messaouda from the textual descriptions. For both women the only physical features that are emphasized are their sexual organs. Furthermore, the unidentifiable prostitute to be evaluated as more sexually pleasing has to conform to the ancient stereotypes of a hyper-sexualized woman, that is she has to be a subordinate being and be black. Male sexual fantasy, exemplified by the narrator’s father, creates a 'new' woman on the unidentifiable space of the prostitute’s body. All the historical stereotypes of blacks merge with the object-body of male social conditioning when the father cries out:

... Ô ma chienne!!! ... Ô ma négresse!!!
... Récois-moi mon esclave!!!... (Messa, 164)

This scene is witnessed by Daouya’s brother and related to the narrator. The young village boys, all adolescents, are

15 One such example is, Dada, a female character in Tahar ben Jelloun, Moha le fou, Moha le sage (Paris: Seuil, 1978). Dada is a black female obtained/purchased by the patriarchal father during his pilgrimage to Mecca.
permanent witnesses to the daily subjugation and objectification of the women, and particularly of Messaouda. The sexual initiation of these boys takes place in the village streets where they observe the adult males sexually abusing and torturing Messaouda.

Having internalized the historical stereotypes and following in the footsteps of the men, they objectify Messaouda by fantasizing about her sexual availability. Messaouda, who is probably twice the age of these adolescents, becomes the receptacle of their newly awakened sexuality. The narrator explains the role Messaouda plays in their initiation:

Passe-temps d'où émergeait le délire des grands et où prenait naissance notre plaisir censuré... Nous languissons en attendant le passage de Messaouda. (Messa, 13)

He continues by explaining how they react when Messaouda is in their presence:

Il suffisait qu'elle s'assît, qu'elle écartât un peu les jambes pour que nous la pénétrions du regard. (Messa, 13)

Abusing Messaouda, not physically but with their gaze and their sexual fantasies, these adolescents are identical to the men in their objectification.

The collective complicity of the village is not restricted to the men. Messaouda, excluded from the traditional female space is also used by the women who exists in a sexual vacuum. Sexually repressed and ignorant of sexual pleasure, Messaouda becomes their source of sexual perversity and pleasure. Gathering around Messaouda, the women ask:
Raconte! Qu’est ce qu’ils t’ont fait aujourd’hui? (Messa, 12)

Listening to Messaouda relating her humiliation at the hands of their own husbands, brothers and fathers, gives the women an idea of the pleasure they are denied. The narrator states:

Les femmes riaient. Les jeunes filles écoutaient. Leurs fantasmes rejoignent les nôtres dans une complicité simulée. Quand Messaouda partait, les jeunes filles se réunissaient ... se touchaient discrètement les seins sous leurs haïk, se faisaient voir la poitrine, se caressaient mutuellement le sexe (Messa, 13)

The women of the village, in degrading Messaouda are demonstrating not only their powerlessness and submission to the dominant socio-cultural structure but also their lack of sympathy for a woman who suffers at the hands of the dominant group.

Messaouda’s being is labeled and debased to such a level that she is isolated from all the social groups of the village. Enclosed in a cocoon of suffering and silence, her voice is only heard when she screams in pain or cries (Messa, 12, 14). Uttering nothing but simple sounds to express basic feelings of pain and pleasure, Messaouda is again reduced to an animal like creature. She occupies a narrow, empty, enclosed space defined by all the villagers. This emptiness symbolizes her silent suffering and her powerlessness when faced with collective complicity and hypocrisy.
The four female characters presented in this chapter, occupy the least respected levels of the socio-religious hierarchy. Although, La Badiène is protected and honored, she is still condemned by society for her status as a single woman. Negatively depicted, the single female character is often compared to animals or insects. This reduction is prevalent because the idea of a woman, a socialized female being, existing without male protection is alien to the communal mentality.

The entire social structure of a Muslim society is based upon the notion of protection, boundaries and limits for the dominated female group. Therefore, a female who is not bound and controlled is an alien and threatening concept. Existing on the periphery of other women’s domestic spaces, the marginalized single woman is generally depicted as being highly sexualized, dangerous and destructive. It is also apparent that the degradation of the single woman is a patriarchal process, intended to either negate or negatively portray the potential of a female to create her own identity. The futile attempts of La Porteuse to re-define herself are an example of the control the dominant group has over the process of social labeling and of passing moral judgments.

The narrative Messaouda demonstrates that those who consider themselves ‘normal’ are clearly deviant in their objectification of others. The dichotomy between black and white as applied to women can be explained as follows:
If white women are to be weak, virgins, passionless and kept on a pedestal as the flower of civilisation, then there must be other women - strong, rapable, or forced into prostitution, super-sexual and held up as evil, immoral, lazy and not quite human.  

A slight modification of this would be to replace ‘white women’ with ‘women who remain within the bounds of appropriate behavior’. Such a category includes female characters like the mother in Messaouda, who are defined by their obedience and submission. In addition, it permits a comparison of these female characters with the marginalized ones discussed in this chapter.

Since the female is always the ‘other’ who is judged and labeled, then for there to be a comparison there must exist an opposite to the label ‘good’. One can then state that these marginalized single women, whose individual existence is by definition ‘bad’, are indispensable to the community, serving the dual function of providing pleasure to the dominant group and acting as a gauge for female compliance to the prevalent social structures and moral codes.

Furthermore, distinguishing the single female with negative moral traits creates an essential difference between her and the male. In this manner the single female, who is

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always negatively portrayed, can never consider herself to be at a similar social level to the male, whose expression of individuality is always positively evaluated. Her objectification is completed by her transformation into a subhuman possessing animal characteristics\textsuperscript{18}. This modification disassociates her completely from both men and women, making her a wretched and corrupt moral and social role model that guarantees her peripheral existence.

\textsuperscript{18} Khadda 36.
CHAPTER VII

SHATTERING THE SILENCE:

communicating the female being

The female condition in narrative discourse has been described, in the previous chapters, as being one of confinement to a literary space which is characterized by oppression, objectification and submission. Controlled by a textual patriarchal system based on religious principles and traditions derived from these same principles, the female characters we have discussed live within prescribed spatial boundaries which are physical, emotional and psychological in nature. Enclosed usually within physical boundaries and always bound by psychological limits and accepted modes of behavior, the female characters we have discussed exist within a repressive and encompassing socially enforced silence.

Under the assumption that the narrative social spaces we have discussed are a reflection of the existent ummah, one can state that female silence defined within the narrative space is also a reflection of silence within the ummah. The ummah can be defined as one speech community¹ where two central elements of construction used in the creation of an organized space are silence and speech. Within this speech community, social relationships as well as power hierarchies are usually defined


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by those who may speak and those who may not. Other questions that can be raised may be about who has the right to utter sacred speech and who profane speech. Additionally, one may study those who have permission to speak within a specific community, as well as those who grant this permission. Why permission is granted, under what circumstances and within which social spaces are additional areas of analysis.

As we have stated in Chapters I and II, the socialization process within the *ummah* ascribes the role of the silent and obedient member to women. Their silence is an integral component of the hierarchy of spiritual and social power which defines their social status. With men commanding and women obeying, female silence maintains the divinely sanctioned hierarchy.

The silence which maintains the social superiority of one group in a speech community is evaluated, by the dominant social group, as a positive characteristic of the dominated group. In the present case, the social divisions of power are based on gender, with males forming the dominant group while the females constitute the silent, dominated group. Any break in the required silence in this gender based power structure is assessed as a negative female characteristic. Furthermore, a rupture in female silence is considered to be a calculated attempt to undermine the social structure as well as an affront.

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to divine injunctions. Any break in the continuum of female silence is socially negative but may be considered positive from the perspective of female self expression and definition.

In her silence the female is always defined by others, who tell her who she is and what she does. On every occasion that the female crosses the boundary of imposed silence, she expresses her self and her being. With this self-expression also comes self definition, and the female during the moment of expression ceases to be the 'you' or the 'other' but becomes the 'I', whereas the receiver of her message becomes the 'other'. Female initiated expression can be defined as subversive and dangerous to the social equilibrium. To reestablish the social order, the silent female member who ceases to be silent must be restrained or expelled from the social space she has disturbed.

If female silence within the ummah is depicted in narrative discourses, then one can assume that the breaking of this silence, that is, the expression of a female voice will also be manifest. In this chapter, it is our intention, despite the powerlessness of the female character demonstrated in the previous chapters, to examine any forms of self expression or self articulation that take place within or without the confines of established female spaces and identities in narrative discourses.

The definition of self expression, in the context of this study, can be any action or expression that the female
character makes or utters which is either forbidden, condemned or evaluated negatively according to the established social norms. These unacceptable communications, punctures in a vacuum of silence, may be expressed by physical action, a change in physical appearance or oral speech.

In a discussion on dialogue, Henri Mitterand distinguishes between two different types of dialogue in narrative discourse:

... le dialogue conversation, dialogue "en 'l'air", ou encore dialogue-commentaire (cognitif)-action (pragmatique), celui où les personnages assument et prennent en charge la situation.³

The types of dialogue which we refer to as communications expressed by a female character, consisting of either verbal expression or physical action, do not necessarily imply the involvement of an 'other', where the 'other' can be either a male or the society as a whole. As a form of communication, it may be a single action taken in silence, or a verbal or written message which demands no response but which 'speaks' loudly, a message the 'other' cannot avoid hearing. These messages, unsolicited, unnecessary and unexpected often have dire consequences and can be classified as innovative acts which either express suffering caused by or demand a change in the socio-cultural status quo. These messages may range from something as mundane as a change of clothing, or a pair of new shoes to social awareness and political commitment.

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³ Mitterand, Dialogue 146.
This self expression, no matter how banal, is important not only for the freedom it provides in enabling to lift, however briefly, the consistent repression, but more importantly, for the social message it conveys. It indicates that within the silence there exists a voice waiting for an opportunity, any opportunity, to break the boundaries that constrict it. Furthermore, it is an expression of what the male has always feared: the potential power of the female voice. This female voice, whether articulated unmethodically or in a thoughtful manner, achieves its communicative goal by using different strategies and methods of expression. The successful expression of the female voice always disrupts the social order and invariably results in confrontation.

We will, in this chapter, discuss not only the types of communication that take place within narrative discourses, but also the process or the events that lead up to it. The narration of the events that instigate the communication are essential not only for the analysis of the communication but also for its integrity within the narrative structure. Whether this female expression is a single cry of suffering or a long process of slow articulation, the narrated events that provoke an expression of the female voice are of interest in

4 Mitterand, Dialogue 146.

5 Mitterand in Dialogue 142, outlines the importance of the narrative sequence of events before a dialogue. Comparing it to the importance of dialogue in theatre: 'si le dialogue, au théâtre, est roi, il n'a pas le premier rang dans le roman; il dépend de la narration, il est régi, piloté par elle'.
this analysis. We will also examine whether the communicative act is carried out with the assistance of others or if it is a singular act in every sense of the word. The impact of this act is usually two-fold, firstly, it obviously influences the lives of the characters and secondly, it shakes the established narrative social structure and socio-cultural spaces. The female character by the sole act of communicating breaches the boundaries of her specified space and crosses into other new, often forbidden spaces. Leaving the designated female spaces, where she goes as well as the consequences of this movement are critical points of discussion in analyzing female identity and social status in narrative discourse.

We begin our study with an examination of the character of the mother in Charibi’s *Le passé simple*. Ma, as we have stated in Chapter III, is identified only by her submission and obedience to the established social order. Living under the strict and oppressive domestic space established by ‘le Seigneur’, she reaches the limit of her patience at the death of one of her young sons. Forbidden by tradition to attend the funeral, she remains behind the locked door of the house. Her hopelessness at that instant is expressed by her pleadings, not to her husband, or her other sons but to the only beings she can cling to in her oppression: God and his saints. Her powerlessness and sense of desperation are obvious in her supplication:

_Saints de l’Islam et de Mahomet, je ne vous ai pas invoqués, vous vous êtes_
...Saints des Grecs et des Russes
...je vous ai invoqués, vous; vous
n'avez plus qu'exaucée ...
Saints des
Juifs et des Tartares, l'on dit que vous
existez: pourquoi n'existeriez-vous pas?
Alors ouvrez cette porte..si vous voulez
je suis Juive, si vous voulez, je suis
Tartare, une chienne, une pourriture, une
merde, s'il vous plaît, ouvrez cette porte!
...ou-vrez-cette porte!... (Passé, 135)

Throughout her life, as well as during this state of
anguish, her one way communication has always been to the
saints, the earthly but holy representations of Allah. As we
can gauge from her plea, she has invoked each and every saint,
believer or heathen, she could think of in the hope of an
answer, a communication, that would lift the sorrow and remove
the chains of her oppression. Unable to communicate with her
husband and her family, and her supplications to a higher
sacred order having been in vain, Ma, in a state of either
utter desperation or amazing strength of will, takes the
decision to make a final communication of her existential
condition to her family and to society. In defiance of divine
decrees against suicide, she takes her life by jumping from the
terrace of the house. We call her suicide a communication
because it is an act that elicits a response from the two
beings, one earthly, the other divine, who have always ignored
and dismissed her. These beings, her husband and her God can
both be defined by the same title: 'le Seigneur'. We can,
therefore, state that when communicating with her husband she
is also communicating with Allah and vice versa. In that the
male, in the social hierarchy, is the guardian of the woman and
the representative of Allah, the effects of Ma's actions on 'le Seigneur', the husband are a reflection of the effects on 'le Seigneur', the divine entity. Ma's suicide is also a communication with society within which she resides because her death occurs within the public domain.

Her suicide is not a secretive swallowing of poison and death in a closed room, but a blatant public demonstration of her suffering and rebellion. That this exteriorization of her suffering and its projection into the public domain was carefully planned is also an important fact. Before her suicide, she calmly and resolutely performs her duties in front of her unsuspecting husband (Passé, 262) and then throws herself from the terrace. This act of rebellion against the social status quo is significant because it is the first and only action taken independently by the mother. Additionally, this show of her will is a desperate attempt to demonstrate her suffering to any sympathizer.

By jumping from the restricted private space of the house to the public open space of her neighborhood, Ma is exposing 'le Seigneur' to society. Her action declares that not all is well in the successful merchant's house. Additionally, it does not provide 'le Seigneur' with an opportunity to cover up her death by claiming it as something other than suicide. Ma's

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6 The Arabic equivalent of le Seigneur, rabb (رب) is one of the ninety-nine attributes of Allah and according to Cowan, ed., 370-371, it signifies 'lord, master, owner'. The father of the family or patriarch can also be referred to as 'the lord of the family': rabb al-`â'lah (رب العائلة).
action releases her from the four walls of the prison called 'home' and ends years of her suffering under the authoritarian rule of 'le Seigneur'. This singular, tragic act that communicates misery, does not belie the popular saying that a woman leaves her house only twice, once upon her marriage and the other at her death.

'Le Seigneur', the husband, dismisses the significance of her suicide by stating:

ce stupide accident, enlevée prématurément ...
... j'affirme: elle était morte depuis des années déjà. (Passé, 246)

Recognizing the fact that, emotionally and mentally, Ma had died many years ago, her violent physical death is an inconvenience rather than an act demanding reflection and remorse. He indifferently declares:

je n'ai ni à la pleurer, ni à la sanctionner: elle n'est plus sous ma tutelle (Passé, 262)

Callously demonstrating his insensitivity and lack of emotions for his wife, 'le Seigneur' declares himself free of any legal and moral responsibility. This reduces her to a senseless object whose financial upkeep (nafaga) was his, now fulfilled, religious obligation. While claiming his indifference as a husband, he does, as the religious representative of 'le Seigneur', the divine entity, indict her:

Dieu est en train de lui demander des comptes: 5000 ans de géhenne, elle s'est suicidée. (Passé, 262)
Containing elements of Islamic tradition and thought, this comment demonstrates 'le Seigneur's' presumptuousness in knowing the actions of Allah as well as the punishment to be accorded. The idea that the actions of an individual during the temporary time spent on earth will be judged and recompensed with eternal salvation or eternal damnation is an often emphasized and deeply rooted moral concept.

Absolving himself of all blame, 'le Seigneur' accuses his narrator-son for inciting his mother to commit suicide:

L'idée d'une révolte ne lui fût jamais venue à l'esprit. Tu l'en as bourée. Elle en est morte (Passé, 261)

The reaction of the son is different. Recognizant of her suffering, the meaning of the suicide is clear to him and he imagines that his mother is with Hamid, her youngest child, whose death caused her enormous pain:

Hamid et ma mère, côte à côte dans leur terre rouge, libérés...(Passé, 266)

Ma's suicide is an act of revolt and liberation, borne of a life of submission and suffering, in which her own being had always been suppressed. Although she may not have changed the opinions of her husband, her humiliating public death casts the

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7 One's life is considered a gift from Allah and to take that life is considered a contemptuous act, punishable by condemnation to Jahannam or Hell. The Hell defined by Islam is similar to the Christian Hell with eternally burning fires, where sinners or disobeyers of Allah's will live for eternity in suffering and pain. Among the numerous allusions to Hell in the Qur'an, one also finds the following: Le Saint Coran, XIV:49-50; XXII:19-22; XXV: 11-12.
shadow of dishonor on le Seigneur, and sends a message to society of her plight.

Another example of a single individual act occurs in Une si longue lettre, where Ramatoulaye's closest friend Aïssatou is confronted with her husband's polygyny. Her situation is similar to that of Ramatoulaye's, discussed in Chapter IV, however, Aïssatou's reaction is completely different. Aïssatou is betrayed by her husband, Mawdo, who contracts a second marriage to a younger woman at the insistence of his status conscious mother.

Society expects Aïssatou, like all first wives, to remain within the marital space and maintain her financial security. Aïssatou is, in fact, advised by those close to her to maintain the status quo (Lettre, 49), however, as Ramatoulaye, the narrator, states, she chooses to leave her polygynous husband: "Tu choisis la rupture, un aller sans retour avec tes quatre fils" (Lettre, 49). The path Aïssatou has chosen to take is, according to Ramatoulaye, one of no return, however, before discussing the consequences of this decision, we must examine the way in which the rupture is announced.

Within the long letter which constitutes the novel, is embedded a letter which the narrator Ramatoulaye has apparently memorized. This letter is a personal communication from Aïssatou to her husband, Mawdo, informing him of her decision to leave the polygynous marital space he has created and within which he expects her to reside. A letter, that is the written
word, used as a form of communication instead of the spoken word has many implications.

Firstly, the written word is a more concrete, and often more thought out and rational form of communication. It excludes the possibility of being as easily dismissed as the word spoken in anger, or with emotion. The written word not only takes time to write and phrase what 'one means to say' but it also forces the reader to pay attention to what the writer is 'saying'. The written word is not 'spoken' lightly and is available for re-readings, and is, therefore, not easily forgotten. Another advantage of the written word is that it permits the writer to 'speak' without interruptions or distractions allowing the writers to express themselves in the way they choose. By exploiting the epistolary genre, that is, by avoiding a direct verbal conversation or discussion writers may be either implying that they do not value the response the reader might have or they may be fearful of a direct confrontation within the text.

In the case of Aïssatou, it can be said that her letter, written at a moment of emotional and psychological suffering, is a carefully thought over expression of her emotions. Aïssatou's letter also suffices as a final and formal rejection that cannot easily be rescinded. Her letter, in its finality, necessitates no response from Mawdo, implying perhaps that her decision is final and not open for discussion. As a matter of fact, her letter corresponds directly to the manner in which
Mawdo announces his re-marriage. Although Mawdo’s communication is verbal, it, similar to the letter, solicits no discussion and demands acceptance.

Aïssatou’s letter is both personal and public in nature. On the personal level, it is a response to a private domestic spatial issue. On the public level, it is a critique of society as well as a breaching of the social codes of behavior. However, for both the public and the private domains, this letter is an expression of herself as an analytical individual with specific needs and desires. She begins her letter by writing:

Les princes dominent leurs sentiments, pour honorer leurs devoirs. Les "autres" courbent leur nuque et acceptent en silence un sort qui les brime". Voilà, schématiquement, le règlement intérieur de notre société avec ses clivages insensés. (Lettre 50)

The princes to whom she refers are those of noble birth and from a higher social class, while the “autres” are those of her own, lower social class. This distinction is also made by Ramatoulaye who, when speaking of Mawdo and Aïssatou, refers to them as “fils de princesse” and “enfant des forges” (Lettre, 33) respectively.

In a society that is carefully structured by socio-economic factors, Mawdo, of noble birth and a male, belongs to the privileged social class that expects the ‘other’, in this case a female of a lower cast to accept whatever may come her way. In this respect, Aïssatou’s letter is a defiance to a social order that requires her to accede to the established
social arrangement. Apart from the letter being a condemnation of the existent social hierarchy by a member of the lower echelons of society, it also expresses the contempt which Aïssatou has for Mawdo and his decision to re-marry:

Si tu peux procréer sans aimer, rien que pour assouvir l'orgueil d'une mère déclinante, je te trouve vil. Dès lors, tu dégringoles de l'échelon supérieur, de la respectabilité où je t'ai toujours hissé. (Lettre, 50)

It can be stated that the written word is probably more effective as a form of self expression for Aïssatou than may have been a verbal communication. The finality of her written message cannot be ignored or disregarded, and her decision bears some consequences.

Aïssatou's refusal to be a co-wife enables her to obtain a divorce, continue her education and begin a steady career, but it also leads her into emotional and physical exile. Even though Aïssatou is not rejected socially, she finds herself alienated by her community and obtains little emotional support, even from her closest friend, Ramatoulaye, who states:

les livres te sauvèrent. Devenus ton refuge, ils te soutinrent... ce que la société te refusait, ils [les livres] te l'accordèrent (Lettre, 51)

Emotionally isolated, Aïssatou's separation from her society is complete when she leaves Senegal for France and eventually resides in the United States. One could conclude that a woman who confronts the established order in a carefully structured society, such as the one depicted in the narrative of Une si longue lettre, cannot continue to reside in that society.
Aïssatou's exile is a direct consequence of her self expression and her unwillingness to submit her being to the dictates of society. Perhaps the emotional, physical and psychological isolation of Aïssatou is a decisive factor in Ramatoulaye's choice to remain a repudiated co-wife.

Comparable to Aïssatou and Ramatoulaye, who were both guided by the ideal of the integrity of the couple, Fatiha in Une femme pour mon fils, unsuccessfully tries to achieve that same ideal. Her attempts at communicating directly with her husband and at creating the husband-wife bond outside of the influence of the extended family unit are condemned by Hocine (Une femme, 201). Emotionally detached and physically isolated from her husband and confined within the four walls of the family home, Fatiha's initial experience of freedom and communication takes place when she is hospitalized for the first time.

The hospital constitutes a unique social space which provides Fatiha with insight into her own submission and also functions as a meeting place for women. Dissimilar to the hammam, which becomes a traditional female space defined by what is socially sacred and forbidden on certain days of the week\(^8\), the hospital is a non-traditional space defined by

\[\text{\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{8}} For a detailed discussion on the hammam as a defined female space in traditionally Islamic societies refer to Abdel Wahab Bouhdiba, \textit{La sexualité en Islam}. For an analysis of the hammam as a female space, as well as the hammam as a space in North African narrative discourse consult T. Michel-Mansour, \textit{La portée esthétique du signe dans le texte maghrébine} 72-83.}\]

physical weakness or debility and sometimes also by psychological fragility. To enter a hospital, a woman does not require male permission, in fact the male family members are forced by the physical or psychological condition of the female to seek medical assistance. The hospital is also a distinct space due to the fact that it functions as an open space in which unrelated men and women reside on a level of relative equality resulting from their illnesses. Although a hospital is a closed space from which one cannot move in or out at will, this restriction is not dictated by socio-religious ideals of who should remain within and who may go beyond the various boundaries.

The hospital is a non-traditional space within which women from all walks of life and all sections of a community can meet with relative ease and communicate freely, without the fear of constant male surveillance. In fact, in this space, the vigilant eye of the community which watches for infractions of the social regulations that structure and define space is conspicuously absent. Within this space the traditional socio-religious hierarchy is also broken down and exists in a simplified and modified form. In existence are three basic channels of communication: between the doctor and the patient, the doctor and the nurse, and the nurse and the patient. The doctors, mostly males, and the nurses, mostly females,

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9 Once again our definition of unrelated is taken from the Qur’ânic definition of blood relations.
empowered not by divine injunction but by scientific knowledge, have power over all patients, male and female.

In a disruption of the traditional pattern of communicative behavior and power maintenance, female nurses can dictate orders to male patients and non-related male doctors can directly address female patients on all matters relating to their physical, psychological and emotional well being. Also of importance, within this space, is that male along with elder female relatives, who are used to controlling and exercising their power, are powerless. Their entry into this space is carefully controlled by specified visiting hours and, as a consequence, their knowledge of events taking place within its boundaries is reduced if not non-existent. The social space of the hospital is distinctive in that it is a simplified communal space within a community of complex communication patterns and overlapping spaces.

It is the simplicity of this spatial structure within the narrative space that enables Fatiha to evaluate her own being and status. On the one hand, the hospital is an escape from her daily restricted existence and gives her the opportunity to see and hear different things:

L'Hôpital, qui l'effrayait et attirait tout à la fois, c'étaient toutes les portes ouvertes d'un coup sur tout ce qui était hors de son univers à elle; c'étaient plein de visages nouveaux; plein d'aventures racontées...
(Une femme, 142)

On the other hand the power structure, with the dominance of the mostly male doctors (there is only one female doctor), is a
constant reminder of the imposition of the will of her family
and that of her husband's upon her own physical and emotional
existence. It is the negative factor of the doctors absolute
control that gives Fatiha insight into her own oppressive
existence. The narrator states:

Son séjour ici lui faisait mieux comprendre
son éternelle situation de dépendence. Dépendence
à la maison; dépendance à l'hôpital; contraintes
là-bas, contraintes ici; obéissance; elle était
réduite à l'obéissance; les autres savaient ce
qui était bon pour elle....Et, plus elle évaluait
son ignorance, plus elle la détestait.
(Une femme, 142)

The other factor that has a strong influence on Fatiha’s
awareness of self and society is the companionship and
friendship of four women of different social backgrounds she
meets at the hospital. These women, ranging in age from
sixteen to over fifty years, demonstrate to her that a sense of
belonging and female solidarity are achievable objectives.
Five women brought together by illness discuss, confide and
communicate their life experiences as well as their hopes and
fears for the future. Powerless but strengthened by
companionship, they, at the prompting of Fatouma, a high school
student and a budding feminist, make a promise of friendship:

- Il faut se promettre de rester amies,
après...
-Promis! dirent spontanément, en riant,
Leila, Zahra et Fatiha. (Une femme, 151)

After she returns to her home, it is this promise of
friendship, the world she has seen within the confines of the
hospital, and the rejection by her husband of her final attempt
to communicate with him that push Fatiha to the edge of and beyond her confined domestic space.

Although Fatiha had, from the beginning of her marriage, tried to resist submitting to the traditional order of her marital space, she had always had the hope that Hocine would understand and assist her. The closure of the door of a hoped for marital unity, along with her experiences, both negative and positive, lead Fatiha to voice her understanding of her social existence and status:

je n’existe qu’en fonction de ce qu’ils attendent de moi, de ce qu’ils veulent que je sois, non de ce que je suis, non de ce que je veux être! (Une femme, 207)

Aware of her existence as an individual entity, Fatiha is unable to bear more suffering, self denial and submission. Taking charge, she communicates an overt challenge to the existing social order when, unveiled, she leaves her assigned domestic space. Attempting to traverse the threshold between the domestic and public spaces, alone and without male permission, the same threshold she crossed for the first time supported by her father-in-law, Fatiha’s way is obstructed by Aïcha whom she pushes aside.

Aïcha as the gatekeeper, represents, in its entirety, the woman as an accomplice of the system. In the absence of the male she guards the domestic space, making sure no infractions occur. With Hocine absent, the father-in-law exercises complete control which is passed on from one male adult to
another until, in the absence of all adult males the power passes to the eldest female (Aïcha) of the house.

Unable to physically stop Fatiha, who refuses to obey her command to return to her room, Aïcha utters the first condemnation: "- Ne pars pas! Tu sera une femme maudite" (Une femme, 213). This moral judgment contains both religious and social elements. In that a woman is supposed to obey both her husband and her elders, Fatiha is, by ignoring Aïcha, who is the oldest family member present as well as being the representative of the absent males, exposing herself to social rejection as a disobedient woman. Furthermore, by leaving the house unveiled, she is disobeying the strict rule of sexual and spatial segregation that defines and maintains the divinely sanctioned segregated social order.

Her action is significant on two planes, the personal and the social, both planes containing spaces constructed according to socio-religious precepts. These same religious precepts condemn her as a fitna and a nashiz, (see Chapter I) because she dares to expose her unveiled body in the male dominated public space as well as for trying to subvert the system and upsetting the social equilibrium.

The possible consequences of her action are presented by a neighbor, Radia, who has observed the scene from a window but stifles an impulse to help Fatiha:

La femme qui quitte ainsi sa famille, si elle n'est pas reprise par ses beaux-parents ou cloîtrée par ses propres parents, si elle n'est pas victime des excès désespérés de la tradition,
Fatiha automatically returns to her parents home in the hope of finding a refuge, but is again confronted with a moral censure from her mother. When Fatiha declares that she will never return to her husband's family, Houria states: "- Fatiha, tu nous a déshonorés!" (Une femme, 215). Pregnant and fatigued, Fatiha collapses and is again admitted into a hospital.

It is, once more, in this non-traditional space that Fatiha reaches another stage in her awareness of self and society. Hope for Fatiha comes firstly, in the birth of a daughter whose custody will not be challenged, because her parents-in-law had wanted and expected a male child. Secondly, it comes with the visit of the friends she had made during her first stay in the hospital. Their visit is not only a promise of friendship that has been kept, but also a glimpse into a new space of female solidarity and friendship that will provide the moral, emotional and psychological support that Fatiha has been unsuccessfully reaching for within the traditional social spaces.

The significance of the narrative social space created by Ghalem is that while realistically mirroring the traditional Islamic boundaries of social space, it also provides a glimpse into a positive restructuring of social spaces based on a female unity which disregards age and class boundaries.

Similar to Fatiha's progression towards self-realization and individual action, but quite different with respect to the
path taken is Maman, the mother in *La civilisation ma mère*. Her journey towards self-realization begins with the arrival, into her domestic space, of two communication gadgets which open up the outside world. The first is a radio which brings the world to her home, and to which she listens all day long (see also Chapter III). The second is a telephone which allows her to communicate with the outside world without ever leaving the confines of the domestic space.

By creating a network of contacts, Maman succeeds in cracking the wall of silence (*La civil*, 58). As the narrative progresses the coming into being of Maman proceeds along two planes, one of social awareness and the other of personal, both mental and physical, transformation. Beginning with the latter, the physical appearance of Maman is first changed by her sons, who buy her a dress and high heeled shoes (*La civil*, 60-62) and take her for a walk outside the four walls of her existence.

The metamorphosis of Maman continues with the shedding of traditional apparel and the adoption of non-traditional/Western dress and eventually the cutting of her hair. This change in her physical appearance, projected in a positive light by the narrator, is a communication to society of her rejection of the traditional way of life she has been leading. The cutting of her hair symbolizes the end of her conforming to ideals of femininity that state that a woman should have long hair. Obviously this 'loss of femininity' is a step towards becoming
'more masculine' and implies a change in attitude and perception as well as a projection of a more 'westernized' and 'modern' woman. A part of the projection of the 'modern' woman is also Maman, the cigarette smoker. A woman smoking publicly, particularly in a society where smoking is restricted to the male domain, sends out a distinct message of her defiance of social norms as well as an independence from male dictates. Additionally, she communicates to the observer her desire to be on an equal footing with men.

On the plane of mental and intellectual awareness and transformation, Maman's education, begun with listening to the radio, continues with her taking courses at the university, makes her acutely aware of the world around her. For Maman, her social consciousness increases along with her self-awareness and her physical transformation. Eventually, she takes on the role of organizer and leader, organizing all her friends in an attempt to speak to Charles De Gaulle who is meeting with other politicians (La civil, 113-115). This episode symbolizes the birth of the national identity of a people as well as that of the individual as a citizen. Maman declares:

...nos peuples aussi existent sur la terre
...ils aspirent eux aussi à la liberté et
la démocratie. (La civil, 117)

Politically committed, Maman and her friends by demanding the recognition of their national identity are at the same time demanding the recognition of their female identity and being.
The colonized citizen, denied a national identity in an oppressive political system, is a metaphor for the woman, repressed by men and socio-cultural norms. In fact, the idea of the leader of a colonizing power and the male relative as being analogous is clearly presented by Maman when she catches a glimpse of De Gaulle. Her son quotes:

- De Gaulle? m’a-t-elle dit, pensive. C’est étrange. J’ai cru voir ton père. Il lui ressemble trait pour trait. (La civil, 125)

The public space having been ‘conquered’, Maman, still has to re-organize her existence within the domestic space. This re-organization is her first and last communication with her husband. The conversation that takes place between husband and wife is a confrontation not only between two individuals, but also between the preservation of tradition and the announcement of change. The husband, carrier and protector of tradition is perplexed and declares to his wife:

Je ne te reconnais plus, je ne te comprends plus. Pendant des années, des années...
(La civil, 128)

He further states that he has always made her life easy, solved all her problems and that, implying a moral elevation: “j’ai fait de toi une femme honorable” (La civil, 130). The husband has upheld, by providing marital and material security, his traditional and religious duties towards his spouse. Having given his wife a socially honorable space to exist in, and having always provided the obligatory nafaga, he cannot comprehend his wife’s disenchantment with her existent social
role and space. Maman responds to his perplexity by asking a pertinent ontological question:


Elle est à l’abri depuis toujours, alors qu’elle voudrait avoir froid, je le sais. Oui, froid. Et faim et soif et joie et misère et vie de tout ce qui existe au-delà de cette porte... Tant de peuples relèvent la tête, acquièrent la liberté, alors pourquoi pas moi?...parce que je suis une femme? parce que je suis ton épouse? A ce compte-là, il fallait te marier avec ton propre portrait (La civil, 131)

It is clear from this monologue of self-expression that Maman recognizes the oppression of the woman who carries the burden of obeying socio-cultural ideals. She equally questions male ambivalence and complicity in repressing the female being. By protecting the woman from the world, as outlined by socio-cultural factors, man has effectively quashed her essence.

Maman does not expect her husband to respond to all her questions, her intention is not to engage in a dialogue, but to argue for her right to exist as a being that needs to ‘be’ just like he ‘is’ rather than an objectified body that needs constant surveillance and protection. Her coming into being, existing as an individual, and expressing herself verbally and physically by her actions and appearance is symbolized by two significant episodes.

The first is her decision to bury all the things which, for her, are representative of the past. Significantly she digs the hole herself in the yard and buries them by stating:
By burying the mementos of her life as a wife and mother she announces the beginning of a new era of her existence as a woman. This new beginning is symbolized by the tree which she plants over the buried objects, a fruit bearing tree (La civil, 142) which continues the comparison the narrator had made of Maman being like a tree (La civil, 25). The symbolism of the tree not only implies a continuation of life but of Maman at the threshold of a new existence. She plants the tree of her choice which carries the promise of fruit. While uprooting the past, she has also planted a future which will take root in the soil of her home as well as her nation.

In another incident her personal triumph and existence is manifest in her making serviettes with ‘Moi’ and ‘Lui’ embroidered on them (La civil, 148). This is a symbolic reversal of the hierarchy that has always existed within a traditional domestic space where the husband is ‘moi’ and the wife is referred to as ‘elle’. Astonished by the reversal in the order of existence, the husband asks: “-Qui c’est, lui?” (La civil, 148).

Although Maman is successful in expressing her identity and her new existence as an individual being, and although she has created a network of female camaraderie and support, her actions are not acceptable in the traditional narrative space. It becomes necessary for her to leave the traditional social
space for a non-traditional space, France, where she can freely exist as an individual.

La civilisation ma mère is a discourse on the symbolic birth of a woman into selfhood, a woman who has led a traditional life of conformity with the established social norms. Although the narrative does describe clearly Maman achieving a stage of individual ‘being’, it does raise some questions concerning the independence of the female character. Examining Maman’s process of emancipation, it is apparent that her sons, one of them the narrator, were continually involved in every stage of her self-realization. We can therefore state that she has been assisted at all stages by males whose stereotypical ideas of womanhood have influenced her ‘becoming’ an individual. Two examples that stand out, are firstly, her adaptation of ‘Western’ dress initiated by her sons, and secondly, the image of a woman who smokes as being emancipated and ‘modern’. With a cardboard image of how an emancipated woman should appear, she also takes the step of moving to France, the symbol of Western civilisation for francophone Africa. The process of becoming occidental, begun by her sons, continues with them because her companion on the trip and during her stay in France will be her son-narrator.

Although she is not dependent on her sons, she has switched her male support from her husband to her son, something done typically by a traditional mother whose prayers for the birth of a son are based on this idea. In fact the idea
of the male (in this case) sons giving birth to the female (their mother) (see Chapter III and La civil, 94) is the complete reversal of the natural biological order. It, however, reflects the traditional notion espoused by the monotheistic religions, of Eve being created from the rib of Adam. Woman, 'the giver of life', an idea that patriarchy has attempted to thrust aside, is successfully buried with Maman, the adult woman being 'reborn' by young boys. However, this idea can be examined from another, more positive, perspective. One can state that these young boys, who may become the dominating males of the future, have decided to grant the female the right to 'be'. This change in the male mentality of domination may be interpreted as an indication of imminent changes in the social hierarchy.

The last communicative act made by a female that will be discussed is a confrontation that takes place between Yaye Dabo and her husband, Baye Tine in "Taaw". As it was stated in Chapter IV, Yaye Dabo the first wife in a polygynous marital space has lived with the constant fear of repudiation. Ever suffering, her patience comes to an end when Baye Tine, after an argument with their son Taaw, threatens to repudiate her. The communication she makes is interesting because she uses both verbal and physical communication to get her message across.

Her verbal communications are commands and decisions which are addressed directly to Baye Tine but require no response.
The intercessions, to explain the gravity of the situation, are made not by the husband but by her friends and neighbors, all female. Outraged by Baye Tine's behavior and threats, Yaye Dabo channels her anger into the action of shoving Baye Tine, who falls to the ground. Standing above him, she announces:

- Tiens, c'est moi qui te répudie et devant témoins. Quitte cette maison.
... Dans cette famille tout ce qui est debout, c'est grâce à moi. Ici tu n'as plus de femme. (Taaw, 183)

Yaye Dabo has empowered herself by taking an action that has always been an exclusively male right. However, in an innovation of the process required by males, she pronounces the formula 'je te répudie' only once, but does so in front of appropriate witnesses.10

Expressing the voice of a shocked society, Yaye Dabo is reproached by a neighbor for humiliating her husband. Without hesitation, Yaye Dabo responds clearly and precisely stating:

- Un mari qui ne te donne ni de quoi manger, ni de quoi t’habiller et jette l’anathème sur les enfants, à quoi sert-il? Baye Tine n’est plus mon mari, ni devant les hommes ni devant mes enfants. (Taaw, 183)

Furthermore, having reversed the order of control and command she, in an act of utter contempt steps over her husband:

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10 The female characters in most of the works of Ousmane Sembène are dynamic and aware of the socio-religious dictates that oppress them. An example is Yacine, the fourth wife in Souleymane, a short story in the collection Voltaïque (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1962) who ingeniously demands that her virginity be returned when threatened with divorce. For an analysis of this short story refer to: Brenda Berrian, Through Her Prism of Social and Political Contexts: Sembène’s Female Characters in Tribal Scars, C. Boyce Davies and A. Adam Graves, eds., Ngambika (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press Inc., 1986) 195-204.
Elle enjambà Baye Tine avec insolence, acte que la société wolof condamne, surtout quand il est exécuté par une femme (Taaw, 183)

Her verbal communication and her physical action are not just a personal insult to Baye Tine but also a "défi à la morale conjugale de la société" (Taaw, 185) which defines gender roles and behavior. Yaye Dabo is aware that she is challenging a society whose communal voice of disapproval is ever present in the comments of other women. She, however, dismisses such critical remarks by stating to one friend: "... tu es trop vulnérable aux paroles des hommes" (Taaw, 186).

Yaye Dabo’s communications and acts of self-expression result from the culmination of years of submission and suffering. Apart from the personal anguish she has had to endure, she is also cognizant of the hypocrisy of a male dominated society that has influenced her, and still influences women like her neighbors. Conscious of the threat her defiance poses to the social order, Yaye Dabo, nevertheless, experiences a sense of power or rather, a reduction in her level of powerlessness.

It is important to note that Yaye Dabo has been emotionally and economically independent of her husband who since his re-marriage has not fulfilled the prescribed spousal obligations. Her self-realization does not arise from being able to leave the domestic space, or from female solidarity, both of which she experiences daily, but from the courage to detach herself from a useless, abusive man despite socio-
cultural injunctions to remain within the space of the first wife. Her feeling of self-expression leads to a sensation of rejuvenation in which her being is finally in control. Her experience of gaining control of herself and her life is fulfilling to such an extent that the narrator states:

Estrangement, elle sent qu’elle met en mouvement un monde nouveau. (Taaw, 189)

The immediate social consequences of Yaye Dabo’s actions are not apparent. What is apparent, however is that Yaye Dabo has begun to live as a strong individual entity who expresses herself clearly. She will endure social condemnation with the knowledge that her female neighbors will support her, and that she will never again be subdued by a male or a male dominated social order.

Table 7.1 is a summary of the female characters that have been discussed in this chapter, along with the type of communication they have made in their respective narrative spaces. Also indicated are the different consequences, both positive and negative, arising from individual female self-expression and realization. Additionally, we have indicated the gender of the author to emphasize that neither do female characters created by female authors necessarily achieve emancipation within their own social space, nor can male authorship be equated with female submission and continuity of female powerlessness.
Table 7.1 - Female Expression in Literary Space

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Type(s) of communication</th>
<th>Results of interventions/communications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ma</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>physical action</td>
<td>self destruction</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>social condemnation</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>death and eternal damnation</td>
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<td>Aissatou</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>written message</td>
<td>emotional isolation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>physical exile</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fatiha</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>physical actions</td>
<td>emotional isolation</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>towards in-laws</td>
<td>physical confinement</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>written message to</td>
<td>familial condemnation</td>
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<td>husband</td>
<td>social dishonor</td>
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<td>change in dress</td>
<td>female solidarity and emotional support.</td>
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<td>verbal message to parents</td>
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<td></td>
<td>verbal contact and</td>
<td>unity of women from all age groups and</td>
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The expression of the female voice in narrative space is an attempt by the female characters to defy a rigid system that has always suppressed female individuality, reducing and restraining it to specific boundaries. By communicating their disenchantment with the status quo, the previously discussed female characters are inadvertently disrupting the social order.
not only in their assigned domestic space but also in the public sphere. These female characters re-define their existence by verbally or physically expressing their essence. A spiritual and social consequence of the expression of female voice is that chaos and disorder are created in an orderly system. This female created chaos earns the women the labels 'disobedient' as well as 'fitna'. Claiming an active existence, these female characters are rejecting the passive existence expected of them by divine decree. The husband of Maman in La civilisation ma mère puts it all in perspective when, addressing his son, he declares:

- Prends la Bible, l'Ancien Testament, le Nouveau Testament, Prends le Talmud, le Coran, le Zohar, le livre des Hindous. Partout, dans toutes les religions, tu ne trouveras que des hommes. Pas une prophétesse, pas une seule envoyée de Dieu. Nous avons vécu dans cet ordre de choses depuis des siècles et nous n'avons pas eu à nous en plaindre, nous, les hommes. (La civil, 171)

The female characters living in a traditional narrative space are a reflection of the women living in real space controlled and organized by a patriarchal system deeply rooted in human history. To challenge that order, that is to come into being, to think, to feel, and most importantly to express that thought or feeling is a deeply shocking experience for the community. Expected to be silent members, women who give expression to their voice may be 'exiled' from the community. This is clearly indicated by the number of female characters who leave their social space. The natural reaction of any community is
to rid itself of subversive and disruptive elements, that is of the fitna.

If, as was stated at the beginning, social relationships and space are defined by the silence of the dominated group and the speech of the dominating group, then a change in the defined rules of communication disrupt the entire social organization. Although the communication Ma makes is extreme and destructive, she, nevertheless, weakens ‘le Seigneur’s’ social position and his power over the domestic sphere. Having lost control of his wife, the one being he is supposed to have complete power over, he can no longer lay claim to absolute superiority.

Hence, any kind of communication made by the dominated group, in our case, the female sex is bound to create chaos. How males, that is the dominant group, handle this social situation and the new female identity that is being expressed without adult male advice and input, will determine what social boundaries will be modified signaling the creation of a unique space for communication. The ideal male actions which would permit the expression of female identity, would be to concede and modify the boundaries of permissible communications. This idealism is finally expressed by Maman’s husband who, realizing his impotence when confronted with this unwanted change and echoing Yaye Dabo’s sentiments, states:

...ce n’est pas seulement une femme nouvelle que je vois devant moi mais, à travers elle, un homme nouveau, une société nouvelle, un monde jeune et neuf. (La civil, 174)
Extrapolating from these comments, one can state that some of the narrative discourses discussed in this chapter cease mirroring reality and progress beyond the social realities of daily existence. The text, transcending social reality, produces paradigms of social transformation which are reflected in the discourses, the organization of literary space as well as the narrative relationships. The author transcends the current social norms producing a discourse in which the reconstruction of the literary social space initiates a fundamental transformation of the patriarchal system to accommodate female independence and self-expression.

However, this ideal vision which contemplates the existence of a space in which the female being controls the expression of her own identity and energy is not a recurrent theme in the narrative discourses analyzed in this work.

In the following chapter we shall attempt to illustrate that even when the female character is mentally, emotionally and spiritually depicted as being equal to the male character, it is under specific and temporary social conditions.
CHAPTER VIII
COMMUNAL STRUGGLE AND FEMALE IDENTITY

The image of the female character is bound, in a reflection of the prevalent socio-cultural norms, by a strict ideology that controls female behavior. However, the restrictive boundaries of social spaces are transgressed normally under two social situations. One form of transgression, which was discussed in Chapter VII, occurs when the female character breaks her enforced silence by either a verbal or a physical individual act of communication. The other type of spatial boundary modification takes place when the community expresses a need for female action and participation in a social process. Whether the female action is requested by the community or is an individual and personal action, it has repercussions which benefit the entire community.

In more general terms we can state that the actions of a powerless, dominated group are usually either controlled or greatly influenced by the dominant group. The dominant group can and will modify the restrictive boundaries only when it serves a specific purpose, and that is when it is to the benefit of the dominant group. Often this modification takes place under situations of extreme social tension or struggle. The most common situation that requires the support and assistance of the dominated group is in the event of socio-
political or socio-economic struggle against a common adversary. As often is the case, revolutionary movements, liberation struggles and social class struggles require a consolidated social support in which all members of a community participate. In such instances, formerly suppressed groups are socially elevated and accorded an unprecedented freedom of movement and respect. In the case of a communal struggle, whether political or economic, the two formerly suppressed social groups that are usually propelled to the forefront are women and youth\(^1\).

More specifically, if we examine the role of women as the dominated social group in any from of collective struggle, a certain ideology of female participation emerges. At the foundation of the patriarchal family unit, the dominated woman functions, ironically, as the guardian of the socio-cultural traditions which suppress her being. All the collective family units forming the community then acquire a collective cultural backbone represented by all the women who are faithful to the male constructed social structures.

Therefore, when required, this protective backbone, or pillar of faithfulness becomes an essential resource in collective combat. Additionally, the subdued female energy, so feared in daily life, can be unleashed to the immense benefit of the community. In this respect, women are redefined as

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protectors of the communal, or national interests. They become not only protectors of their domestic space (home) but also guardians of the greater home, defined by political boundaries\(^2\). Projected beyond the usual boundaries and definitions of social existence, women become the 'signs of political goal and cultural identity'\(^3\). This new permitted and respected female activity, signifies a breakdown in the patriarchal structure. Furthermore, by bringing the dimension of gender and gender roles to the surface, it announces the possibility of the construction of new social spaces and identities.

The role of gender in socio-political and socio-economic struggle is distinctly represented in the literary discourses of certain African authors. In the narrative reproduction of these social conflicts, the authors 'borrow' heavily from reality. Inspired by historical events, they construct a parallel narrative social space in which the literary characters are involved in ideological and political struggles representative of the real.

In this chapter, we intend to discuss three specific narrative discourses, each distinct in its representation of communal confrontation. Apart from examining the type of role played by the female characters in the represented struggle, we


\(^3\) Valentine Moghadam, Introduction and overview: Gender dynamics of nationalism, revolution and Islamization, Gender and National Identity 2.
will also study the changes in female identity and social status that take place during and after the resolution of the conflict. If literary spaces function not only as representations of the real but also as announcers of ideological change, then the final existential condition of the female character will serve as an important social signifier, signaling either a change in the patriarchal and socio-religious social structures or a return to the pre-struggle status quo.

This chapter will be divided into three sections, each a study of female characters involved in a distinct social struggle. We will begin by analyzing the status of the female character during a socio-political conflict, the Algerian war of independence, as represented in the works of Assia Djebar. Although a referential framework based on the independence struggle is utilized in many of her narrative discourses, we will be concentrating on the female characters in *Les enfants du nouveau monde*[^4] and *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*. In the second section we will examine the socio-political struggle represented in *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* by Ousmane Sembène. Of particular interest to us will be the character of Penda whose leadership qualities are exploited to the benefit of the social struggle as well as of female solidarity. We will close this chapter by studying Aminata Sow Fall's *La grève des Bâttu*[^5].

in which the represented class structures of power and control are reversed by the power and control of a unique female character, Salla Niang.

**Female combatants**

A collective struggle necessary implies a desire for a change in social structures. While the goal of the struggle is to bring about some changes, other transformations and social mutations take place unknowingly, often out of necessity. One of these undesired mutations of gender role definition in a patriarchal society is explicitly expressed in the narratives of Assia Djebar. Within the narrative framework of a society in violent transformation, she places female characters whose actions lead to a discovery and a re-definition of their being. The entrenched spatial separation of male and female spaces is apparent at the beginning of *Les enfants du nouveau monde*. While the men are active and physically involved in the struggle in the mountains, the women passively watch from behind the curtains, restrained to their domestic spaces. Two female characters, submissive and confined contribute to the communal struggle by sheer force of their will.

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Amna, the wife of a policeman who collaborates with the colonial rulers, leads an existence burdened by the traditional role of wife and mother. Her husband, Hakim defines her as:

cette femme à force de passivité, est devenue une partie de lui, une partie morte...
(Les enfants, 86)

Interrogated by her husband, Hakim, concerning the movements of their neighbor Youssef, Amna has to find the strength to make a decision which could save the husband of her friend and neighbor Chérifa. While protecting Chérifa and her husband, Amna at the same time betrays her own husband's trust and destroys their conjugal relationship. When Chérifa finds Amna distraught and incoherent after the interrogation, the transformation is quickly perceived:

Ce n'était pas la sécheresse qui faisait vibrer sa voix mais la volonté nouvelle chez cette femme lourde, au corps fatigué
(Les enfants, 85)

This newly discovered force, latent for so long, gives her the impetus to lie to her husband, and as a result save Youssef's life. This communicative act of defiance is not only a break from the constant subjugation of her existence but also signals her participation in the collective struggle. Her lie is an awakening from the state in which she preferred to remain ignorant of her husband's activities as well as a protest against her subjugated existence. Additionally, by her action she valorizes her friendship with Chérifa, emphasizing that the female companionship and trust are more valuable than the male-female couple relationship.
Chérifa, who has always led a confined existence, has, only once, expressed her will in an earlier incident. Formerly married to a wealthy man she did not love, Chérifa protested by remaining aloof and silent. Her passive defiance eventually led her husband to divorce her. Remarried to Youssef, a man she loves and whose life is endangered by his involvement in the struggle, Chérifa is paralyzed by her desire to act and the ignorance of what steps to take. The narrator comments:

Pour une épouse heureuse vivant au coeur d’une maison d’où elle ne sort pas, selon les traditions, comment prendre pour la première fois la décision d’agir? Comment “agir?” Mot étrange... (Les enfants, 137)

Finally taking a decision, Chérifa chooses an old, worn veil and leaves her house to find Youssef at work. Her path through the unknown streets, where her veil is equally protective and revealing, is a discovery and an expression of her being. Symbolizing an oppressed being, anonymous in her submission, she, by the sole fact that she is a woman, draws the attention of the men who examine her veil for signs of identification:

Ils ont noté aussitôt la finesse de la cheville, les souliers non éculés – ce ne sont pas des babouches de vieille –, le voile de soie différent de celui des filles du fleuve... (Les enfants, 140)

Conscious of the penetrating male gaze, a social constant attempting to unveil her anonymity, Chérifa is filled with shame but continues on her mission. Achieving her goal, Chérifa is aware that her decision and consequent action have
created a passage into a new level of existence, in which her being is challenging, aware, and defiant:

...elle a traversé la ville entière, cette présence pour elle aux yeux multiples, hostiles et au terme de cette marche, elle a découvert qu'elle n'est pas seulement une proie pour la curiosité des mâles - une forme qui passe, mystère du voile... - non, elle a existé; (Les enfants, 229)

Although aware of her strength, Chérifa cannot clearly state her desire to become further involved in the resistance and leave with Youssef. Youssef, meanwhile, is too preoccupied to observe the break Chérifa has made with her previous level of existence, which is expressed by her partial statement: “Je voudrais...” (Les enfants, 230). Obliged to return home to a life of solitude and waiting, Chérifa is beyond the “stérile attente” (228) which was her former habit. With the awareness of self and her social situation, the wait for Youssef’s eventual return is faced with a newly discovered energy. Commenting on Chérifa’s perturbed condition, another female character states:

Mais elle frémit, mais elle vit aussi...
(Les enfants, 232)

Apart from this recently created space of female involvement which leads to an ontological awareness and a rupture with the past, another female space defined in the narratives of Assia Djebar is also of importance. This space is created by the modification that takes place in the traditional female space during the absence of the male family members. The traditional male guardians or protectors either
in hiding or dead, the females characters in Djebar's discourses adapt to their unusual situation. Whether in command of their domestic space, or experiencing a change in their being and social definition, this power over spatial boundaries sometimes has negative consequences for the female character and her individual existence.

All the female characters, existing alone are enclosed in a void. This void resulting from the solitude created by a communal struggle manifests itself in different ways. Amna's psychological isolation from her husband because of his duties as a collaborator, results in frustration which is channeled into violence against her children. Chérifa lives in a void created by regret that she could not accompany Youssef. She is aware that this void will not be filled by the days of waiting ahead of her. However, because of her newly discovered courage, she faces this emptiness with calm and certitude:

Youssef est parti; en une seule fois, dans la dernière étreinte, à l'ombre de ce magasin inconnu, elle a aspiré, comme un naufragé une force de vivre; désormais pour elle, tout peut continuer: les jours de spectacle où l'on reste assise à regarder la guerre, et les autres, à oublier, à attendre, à tuer l'ennui, et quelquefois la désespérance. (Les enfants, 233)

The solitude of female existence is exemplified by Lila, a Western educated woman used to occupying a non-traditional domestic space, but whose husband has also left to join the resistance. The depth of her inner solitude is reflected in
her choice of residence. Requesting an apartment in an empty building outside the town limits, she states:

"Donnez-moi l'endroit le plus désert, le plus froid." (Les enfants, 42)

In an attempt to challenge and overcome her loneliness, the narrator explains Lila's decision to enclose herself in a silent, uninhabited space:

Elle avait envie de s'arrêter quelque part... s'arrêter, dormir, oublier dans la solitude de ces pièces intactes, suspendues au sommet des lieux désertés, oublier quoi, sinon elle-même, elle seule que le départ d'Ali avait laissée plus seule encore. (Les enfants, 44)

Lila's withdrawal from the traditional social spaces abruptly ends with her unwitting involvement in the political struggle when she is arrested as a co-conspirator. The change in space from the self-imposed psychological prison of solitude to the physically confining walls of the local prison, are an indication of Lila's passage from passivity to an active existence. While Chérifa's awareness of self expanded as she took action and navigated the unknown streets of the open space of the public domain, Lila is physically transferred from one enclosed space to another, each space signifying a different level of existence and involvement.

The feeling of being a non-entity and of non-existence which had enveloped Lila are transformed, when as a participant in the struggle, her existence is validated:

Quelle chance, se-dira-t-elle ensuite... quelle merveilleuse chance d'être quelconque sur une terre. (Les enfants, 310)
Sharing a cell with another female prisoner, Salima, one is aware that Lila will, under the suffering caused by confinement and torture, become what Salima is. Salima, whose spirit has been broken by physical torture and interrogation, is enclosed in a timeless vacuum. Her existence is reduced to that of a shadow of a human being on the verge of insanity.

This ambiguous result of a new ontological awareness through socio-political involvement is also manifest in the narrative space of *Femmes d’Alger dans leur appartement*. In this representation of the post struggle period, two female characters Sarah and Leila, not unlike Salima and Lila, are united in their suffering and their inability to adjust to the new socio-political structure⁷, which spatially resembles the old. A patriarchal society transformed by war is re-integrated when:

Les fils barbelés ne barrent plus les ruelles, mais ils ornent les fenêtres, les balcons, toutes les issues vers l’espace. *(Femmes d’Alger, 60)*

Along with the re-definition of the pre-struggle social boundaries that separate male and female space, the socially respected gender roles are re-instituted when the female again conforms to societal expectations:

Elle avait repris le rythme des accouchements au lendemain de l’indépendence *(Femmes d’Alger, 18)*

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⁷ This social inability to define the female combattant is also expressed in *Les alouettes naïves*, when the narrator states:

Les "combattantes", comme on dit à T..., avec un sentiment de malaise devant cette espèce nouvelle...en dehors des prostituées, en dehors du harem respectable des épouses cloîtrées, où mettre les hérosines et surtout comment réagir devant elles? (235)
However, Sarah, who has accepted the traditional label of wife, is socially alienated and enclosed in a continued silence. Her adolescence having been marked by confining prison walls, freedom and independence imply a modification of social boundaries. Asked what she does, she states:

- Je marche toute la journée... je ne me lasse pas de marcher dehors... (Femmes d’Alger, 40)

The memory of confinement, and the refusal to be confined again is signified by Sarah’s daily restless roaming and is reminiscent of the Qur’anic Hagar\(^8\) wandering in the desert. The mental suffering that Leila has endured is expressed not by action, as in Sarah’s case, but by escape into an incoherent mental space of delirium. While Sarah’s physical wound has healed, Leila’s body suffers from physical weakness as her mind endures psychological trauma. Tormented by the knowledge that the success of the political struggle did not result in gender role transformation.

Eulogized for their heroism by their ‘brothers’ in the common struggle, the female combatants are, in the newly independent society, marginalized and forgotten. Leila, referring to the female combatants asks: “...sont-elles restées vraiment vivantes?” and to the male companions she pointedly questions: “Y a-t-il jamais eu des frères...” (Femmes d’Alger, 61).

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\(^8\) *Le Saint Coran*, XII:8, XIV: 35-37.
Male suffering during the struggle for independence is expressed by the nightmares that Sarah’s husband, Ali, has of a woman being tortured (Femmes d’Alger, 13-14). This male torment is a consequence of male powerlessness and lack of control over his space as well as the ineptitude in protecting those under his care. Still bound by the traditional patriarchal rules of guardianship and protection of the ‘weaker sex’, the male in haunted by an inability and a failure that have resulted in the physical and spiritual violation of ‘his woman’. While male suffering is egotistical, female suffering, expressed by both Sarah and Leila, encompasses all femininity and weeps for the oppression and subjugation that delimits female existence. Sarah, lamenting the female condition states:

... elle pleurait avec une tendresse défaite, dans une pénombre des voix féminines. Pour rien, pour elles toutes (Femmes d’Alger, 47)

While Leila in a state of delirium and suffering cries out:

Les bombes explosent encore... contre nos yeux, car nous ne voyons plus dehors, nous voyons seulement les regards obscènes, elles explosent, mais contre nos ventres et je suis... je suis tous les ventres ensemble de la femme stérile. (Femmes d’Alger, 61)

Female protesters

The narrative of Les bouts de bois de Dieu is centered around one historically significant event, that of a railway workers strike. Inspired by the 1947-48 strike under colonial

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rule, Ousmane Sembène creates this conflictual narrative space to signal not only resistance to the colonial rule, but also to suggest fundamental changes in the socio-religious communal space. These changes are partly manifest through the actions of two female characters, Ramatoulaye or Rama who occupies a traditional domestic space and Penda, who is independent, young and single, and whose marginalized existence is defined by sexual liberty.

Rama’s traditional role as nurturer has become very difficult as a result of the strike. Struggling to obtain food on credit to feed all the starving members of her large family, Rama’s conflict, which takes place at a personal level has broader social implications. In contrast to her starving family, her brother El Hadji Mabigué, always accompanied by his fat ram, Vendredi, is described as a wealthy, corpulent man complacent in his hypocrisy. As the religious head of their neighborhood, instead of supporting the strikers, he is inactive in his fatalism. He states to Rama:

Je sais que la vie est dure, mais cela ne doit pas nous pousser à désespérer de Dieu... Il a assigné à chacun son rang, sa place et son rôle; il est impie d’intervenir. Les toubabs sont là: c’est la volonté de Dieu. Nous n’avons pas à nous mesurer à eux car la force est un don de Dieu et Allah leur en a fait cadeau. (Les bouts, 83)

A representative of the established socio-religious structures which, according to him require no modifications, El Hadji Mabigué’s patronizing attitude is a reflection of his
status in the community. Enraged but powerless, Rama threatens to kill Vendredi. When the opportunity presents itself, Rama engages in a struggle with Vendredi, killing him and thus providing food for her family:

...et par trois fois elle [Rama] enfonça la lame dans le cou de l’animal; le sang gicla à nouveau... Ramatoulaye essuya son arme en la passant sur l’épaisse toison, puis elle se redressa. Il n’y avait dans son regard ni fierté ni orgueil, simplement une sorte de satisfaction... (Les bouts, 115)

This struggle with Vendredi is symbolic in many ways. In a defiance of El Hadji Mabigué authority in the neighborhood, Vendredi, the animal saved by El Hadji Mabigué for a religious sacrifice, is slaughtered to feed the starving of a strike towards which he has expressed his opposition. This incident is also significant in that it breaks a socio-religious tradition which forbids women to slaughter animals. Additionally, Rama’s slaughter of the ram undermines male religious and social authority and accords power to the female. The female energy, fitna, so feared by the patriarchal and religious structure, is released in a moment of desperation and suffering, overthrowing momentarily the established hierarchical and gendered social order.

Having expressed her voice and identity through action, Rama realizes and understands that this appropriation of power carries with it a new and unknown responsibility:

Le rôle de chef de famille est lourd, trop lourd pour une femme...
- Quand on sait que la vie et le courage des autres dépendent de votre vie et de
votre courage, on n’a plus le droit d’avoir peur... même si on a très peur! (Les bouts, 117)

While Rama is described as being silent, passive, and obedient before the strike, Penda is described as being self-assured and harsh, both in action and speech. Chosen by the male strikers to distribute rice rations to the women, Penda’s conflict with one of the women, Awa represents not only a lack of solidarity among the women, but also the clash of social roles. Awa, a conformist, defining herself by her relationship to a man, refuses to accept her ration served by Penda, labeling her “putain” (Les bouts, 223).

The bestowing of power during a period of struggle to a single young woman, is as unacceptable to the established social order as Rama’s slaughter of Vendredi. Although Awa, or ‘Eve’ represents the patriarchal authority, as does El Hadji Mabigué, she is not respected by the other women. The narrator states: "tout le monde la redoutait pour sa malveillance" (Les bouts, 223). However, what is of significance is that Awa’s being, which has been dependent on and expressed through male relationships is transformed under Penda’s influence. Awa states:

- Penda, je ne retourne pas à Thiès, je continue avec vous. Je te promets de ne plus faire la difficile... (Les bouts, 311)

The transformations that take place from the moment that Penda is selected to distribute the rice, are not limited to the level of an individual. Given the opportunity to express her potential, Penda instigates changes at the broader social
level. Penda expresses her feminist ideals and gives the women a voice by forming a "comité de femmes" (Les bouts, 248), which not only discusses the social agitation and turbulence caused by the strike, but also represents the women at the meetings of the striking workers.

The women's march, organized by Penda is the culmination of her determination and commitment to instigating social transformation. Apart from bringing together all the women in a type of feminist union, the idea of the women's march is significant at two levels. Firstly, the announcement of the march by Penda, projects the female voice into the public domain. A historic event in the social consciousness of the community, the narrator commenting on Penda's announcement states:

De mémoire d'homme c'était la première fois qu'une femme avait pris la parole en public à Thies... (Les bouts, 289)

The other significant result is the permission given by all the men to allow their female family members to participate in a socio-political struggle that had, up to this point, been restricted to the men. At a psychological level, this permits the women to display their collective strength and at an emotional level, it demonstrates female unity, which, formerly, had been characterized by bickering and superstitious accusations. Lastly, it permits the women a freedom of physical movement previously unknown. Although escorted by a small number of men, their presence at the very back of the
group of female marchers is an indication of the changes that have provoked a reversal of the traditional gender roles.

The march is headed by three women, all representing different female social roles and spaces. One is a married woman, Mariame Sonko, who is defined by the label “wife of...”. Her presence at the head of the marchers is an indication that a married woman need not be restrained by the traditional spatial boundaries. The second woman, Maïmouna, a blind woman is a representative of all the marginalized females. Additionally, the image of the blind leading the seeing, towards some kind of resolution or liberation, is symbolic in itself. The third woman is, of course, Penda, who exemplifying the power and authority of the female in combat has modified her dress by wearing a soldier’s military belt. This slight modification, although representative of change, also signifies that Penda has neither sacrificed her femininity because she still wears a pagne, nor has she become occidental by donning the khaki uniform of a soldier.

An African, a woman, a combatant, Penda’s socio-political involvement reaches a mythical level when she is killed by soldiers as the marchers enter Dakar. The martyr, sacrificing her life for a shared struggle, leaves behind a legacy of courage and strength that becomes part of the collective memory of a community. The female unity enforced by Penda during the march, continues after her death, in the realization of a
female ‘community’, which keeps the memory of the march and Penda’s sacrifice alive (Les bouts, 371).

Predictions of imminent change are present throughout the narrative. At the beginning of the narration a new awareness in manifest in the men when confronted with female determination. The narrator states:

... les hommes comprirent que ce temps, s’il enfantait d’autres hommes, enfantait aussi d’autres femmes. (Les bouts, 65)

The significance of the transformation is not only in the determination expressed by the women but also in the realization that this female change is brought about by a change in the collective traditional male perspective. Most importantly, there is an awareness that control of space and appropriation of power are not exclusively male privileges:

Quelque chose de nouveau germait en eux, comme si le passé et l’avenir étaient en train de s’étreindre pour féconder un nouveau type d’homme, et il leur semblait que le vent leur chuchotait une phrase... souvent entendue: “L’homme que nous étions est mort...” (Les bouts, 127)

Furthermore, the female characters are the instigators of most of the action in the narration. While the male characters remain static in their status as strikers, usually only meeting to discuss the progress of the strike, the female characters have taken charge of the narrative spaces of residence and action. Bakayoko, the only male character in constant movement is physically absent throughout the narration. He symbolizes
the invisible forces of change which the female characters, as active agents, bring about.

Female movement beyond the traditional domestic space and the communal public sphere, is exemplified by the chapter headings of the narration. While all the sections have been named for cities, static, bordered spaces, the section devoted to the march is titled 'De Thiès à Dakar'. An indicator of movement from one space to another, this chapter announces a transitional phase of motion from one bound space to another along with a reversal of the traditional active male/passive female dichotomy. Signifying socio-political change as well as a transformation in female identity, the physical motion of the marchers symbolizes the mental and psychological changes and developments that take place in the creation of gender based spatial boundaries.

In the revolutionary discourse of Les bouts de bois de Dieu, while the men use female energy and strength to their socio-political advantage, the adulation of the female heroines presents a social metamorphosis. The activity and self confidence of the female characters transform the spatial and psychological boundaries of ontological definition, permitting female individuality and expression as well as a freedom of movement.
Female leadership

The social satire of *La grève des Bàttu* is constructed on the dichotomy that exists between the poor and wealthy, or more generally, the dominant and the dominated, in any social space. Within the context of a Muslim society, the relationship between these two social groups, that is between 'the haves' and 'the have-nots', is based on the religious principles of *zakâh* and *sadaqa*. *Zakâh* ¹⁰, a Qur'anic injunction and one of the pillars of Islam, obligated every Muslim to give a specified portion of his/her wealth to the needy. Apart from *zakâh*, every Muslim is encouraged to give voluntary charity, or *sadaqa*, the form or amount of which is entirely dependent on the giver.

Using these two socio-religious concepts, Aminata Sow Fall has constructed a narrative social space in which the two social groups, the wealthy and the beggars are interdependent. The beggars cannot survive without the daily offerings in food, clothes and money, whereas the wealthy, obligated to fulfill a religious duty also have their personal interests in mind. Each act of charity, instead of being a selfless act of

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¹⁰ Accorded an importance equal to the daily prayers (*salât*), numerous references to *zakâh* are made in the Qur'ân. In surah al-baqarah (II): 110, it is stated:

Et accomplissez la salât et aquittez la zakât

وَاْ قُوموا الصُّلُوْة وَأَتِمُوا الْزَّكَاةُ

Refer also to II:277; 24:56. However, in certain Muslim societies the equating of *salât* and *zakâh* takes place to such an extent that *zakâh* commonly becomes the expression of *salât*. 
generosity, is a selfish act as a result of which the givers’ hopes to obtain divine favors and compensation. Comprehending the motivation to always give charity, one of the beggars declares to his companions:

Ils ont besoin de donner la charité parce qu’ils ont besoin de nos prières; les yeux de longue vie, de prospérité, de pèlerinage, ils aiment les entendre chaque matin pour chasser leurs cauchemars de la veille et pour entretenir l’espoir d’un lendemain meilleur. Vous croyez que les gens donnent par gentillesse? Non, par instinct de conservation. (La grève, 32)

Dependent on the self-interested generosity of the dominant group, this marginalized social group meets every evening in the courtyard of the home of a female beggar, Salla Niang. Organizing a daily collection and a drawing as well as stocking her shop by cheaply purchasing the daily collection of the beggars, she is described as:

Une véritable femme d’affaires,... ancienne bonne à tout faire (La grève, 16)

When the city is being ‘cleansed’ of the beggars due to the policies of a misguided and ambitious politician, Salla Niang’s courtyard becomes the center of resistance and challenge. Providing a meeting place, a space where the collective voice of the dominated group can be heard, confers prestige and respect upon Salla.

After the death of one beggar, two characters who unite the beggars are Salla Niang and Nguirane Sarr, a blind man. Not unlike Maïmouna in Les bouts de bois de Dieu, Nguirane Sarr can be seen as the blind leading the oppressed masses to
salvation. Although not active in leadership, he is the philosopher/ideologue of the resistance. Because the beggars are harassed and abused while they beg at their usual positions in the city, Nguirane provides a solution to the problem. His two ideas “organisons-nous” (*La grève*, 33) and “Restons-ici! Ne bougeons plus d’ici!” (*La grève*, 51) are put into action by Salla Niang, who takes command and addresses the beggars.

In a marginalized social space, where the patriarchal hierarchy is non-existent, Salla Niang’s authority and power are respected. Referring to the beggars as “petits talibés”, her position is similar to that of a marabout or religious teacher who sends out his disciples to supplicate and seek charity. Recognizing her authority, the beggars have confidence in her due to her ‘education’:

*Ils la savent femme d’expérience. Elle a eu tout le loisir de se frotter contre le monde... L’école de la vie, la meilleure école sans doute* (*La grève*, 33-34)

Instigating the creation of a separate space of power outside the city limits, that is outside the boundaries of the traditional power structures, Salla Niang’s home becomes the center of the beggars’ revolt. Renamed “l’arrêt des mendients” and “la maison des mendients”, citizens wishing to give zakâh and *sadaqa* have to make the effort to travel outside the city limits to find the beggars.

The transformation in the sphere of action is obvious. The beggars who were formerly in motion, moving daily to their
positions and actively begging for alms in a social space where they were powerless, are now static and passive:

Ils ne viennent plus chercher leur pitance, on la leur apporte (La grève, 71)

On the other hand, the alms givers who passively gave at every street corner, now have to move to the physical space controlled by the beggars. This movement from a controlled space to a space in which they have no control places the alms givers in a position of inferiority. Having always taken the beggars for granted, this incredible change is difficult to understand:

Peut-on seulement imaginer une vie où l'on ne pourrait pas s'acquitter de son aumône journalière avant d'avoir fait des kilomètres et des kilomètres (La grève, 71)

This appropriation of power by reversing the order of activity culminates in a confrontation of the leaders of both groups: Salla Niang, the leader of the beggars, and Mour Ndiaye, director of the “Service de la salubrité publique” and the one who ordered the removal of the beggars from the city limits. Mour Ndiaye, in his ambition to become vice president, is forced to go to the beggars to supplicate them to return to the city so that he can make his prescribed sadaqa. First, Salla calmly watches an interchange between Nguirane Sarr and Mour Ndiaye, then, she abruptly dismisses Mour with a vague statement promising the beggars return to the city. Mour, proud of his communicative abilities, leaves the beggars space with confidence.
The next day, his sadaqa prepared, an infuriated Mour Ndiaye, not finding a single beggar declares:

"Ils sont fourbes, hypocrites, menteurs! Voilà pourquoi ils en sont réduits à mendier... Chacun n’a que ce qu’il mérite!..."

"Ils m’ont abusé, ils m’ont délibérément abusé!..." (La grève, 118)

With the reversal in the social order brought about by the beggars strike, the judgments and accusations made by Mour Ndiaye, should, in actual fact, be applied to himself. Ironically, Salla Niang’s power and control of the marginalized space as well as of the beggars have empowered them to such an extent that the socially powerful now come to beg at their doorstep.

Salla Niang, is an example of a female character who is not only intelligent but has the communication skills to unite a socially negligible group of individuals. Her authority, in the gaze of the traditional social hierarchy, has one victim, her husband, Narou. The neighborhood gossip, not understanding their relationship, and surprised and shocked at the dominance of Salla Niang have labeled him as weak:

- C’est Salla Niang qui porte le pantalon.
- Il n’est même pas un homme digne.

(La grève, 19)

Demonstrating the opposite characteristics of a traditional couple relationship, negative labeling of the Salla-Narou couple is to be expected. One interesting reversal of the customary social labeling is in the usage of proper names. In most narrative discourses the male characters are identified by
both given and family names, while, the female characters are
either referred to by their first names or a generic
identifying label which associates them with a male family
member. Usually, both male and female literary characters in
Senegalese narrative discourses are identified by a given and a
family name, however, as an indication of her empowered
individual existence, devoid of any patriarchal dominance,
Salla Niang is referred to, throughout the narrative, by both
her names, whereas her husband is identified only by his first
name.

In evaluating the creation of space and female being, one
can state that in a social space dominated by traditional
socio-religious norms, Salla Niang is a powerless woman,
occupying the lower echelons of society. Her social roles of
maid and later, beggar imply powerlessness, subjugation and
suppression. By defining her own space and creating in the
process a sub-society, Salla Niang’s character demonstrates an
uncommon stage of female empowerment.

The mutual dependence of the beggars and the rest of
society can be seen as a metaphor for gender relationships,
where the economic powerlessness of the female often reduces
her to begging\textsuperscript{11}. However, by breaking the power structure,
and disturbing the solidly entrenched roots of the patriarchal
system, Salla Niang exemplifies the economic independence of

the female as well as her socio-political potential in collective defiance.

In the representation of the female condition in these narrative discourses, there is a progression from the heroism and suffering of the liberation struggle which is confused with gender role transformation in Assia Djebar’s narratives to the expression of female individuality and leadership in an alternative social space represented in La grève des Bâttu. The framework of a socio-political and socio-economic struggle provides a spatial medium, an in-between space of confused boundaries and half forgotten patriarchal norms, in which the female character is launched. While this struggle creates the essential space required for female ontological expression and transformation, the female character is nonetheless a vehicle through which the male consolidates his position.

Given an opportunity, under unusual circumstances, to validate her existence, the consequences of this transformation and gender role mutation are only manifest after the resolution of the struggle. Quite often the glory and power of female expression experienced during a period of conflict disappear as the society returns to ‘normal’ and reconstructs the former spatial boundaries. This shattering of the new female is all the more pronounced due to the extent of female suffering within the female spaces of Assia Djebar’s narrative. The struggle for female verification has been suppressed by a
return to former traditional values and the confinement of women to their domestic spaces and social roles.

While Ousmane Sembène, throughout his narrative, announces the creation of a new man and woman, his female characters also return to their domestic spaces. This return, different from the one represented by Djebbar, is underlined by the promise of female solidarity. However, female control of domestic, economic and socio-political space triumph in Aminata Sow Fall’s discourse. The emphasis nonetheless, remains on space, that is, a new space which is essential for a female existence free of male domination. It is distinguishing characteristic is a complete rupture from traditional socio-cultural norms and spatial boundaries. One can state that the social vision of a new feminine consciousness that is destroyed in Djebbar’s discourses and barely sustained in Sembène's, is presented in an ideal, albeit marginalized, version in Aminata Sow Fall’s narrative.
CONCLUSION

We have attempted, in this study, to elucidate on certain fundamental aspects of spatial construction in Muslim narrative discourses from francophone Africa. In elaborating on the narrative female social condition, the focus of our study has been to examine the socialized female as a construct of intertextual references. As part of a system of values, a culture based on socio-religious principles and interdictions, literary production emanates from these values and in turn reflects them.

The construct ‘Muslim woman’ is a culture specific definition of a socialized female being, while her literary portrayal is dependent on a patriarchal hierarchy defined by Islamic doctrine. As an integral and cohesive component in the construction of social space, the presence of religious doctrine is manifest in all social interactions. However, in literary texts, the Islamic principles utilized in the construction of narrative spaces are not obviously present but function as an underlying and implicit structuring ideology.

This underlying ideology, which follows Qur’ânic principles, is essential in creating narrative female stereotypes of economic dependence such as nafaqa as well as socially subjugating ideologies of female confinement and veiling. Furthermore, the female characters in Muslim spaces are confined by the religious traditions of fitna and nushûz,
while socio-historical stereotypes categorize, debase and objectify the black African woman. The socialized female or woman, as reflected in the narrative discourses discusses in this work, is produced from the articulation of a divine discourse embedded in the cultural practices of a Muslim society. A moral signifier, her existence and definition are always dependent on patriarchal textual practices\(^1\). The character of the Muslim female being is, indirectly, a divinely sanctioned male construct of what a 'woman' should be. While the narrative discourses we have discussed reflect the static and atavistic social structures as well as the actual social status of the Muslim woman, the rupture with the social status quo of male hegemony and rigorously defined gendered spaces is also evident.

The social spaces in some of Ousmane Sembène narratives create opportunities for female social participation and individual expression, while maintaining a traditional mode of existence. Other narratives delineate female subjugation and mock male aspirations for social and political status. Abdoulaye Sadji's discourse represents the traditional social values of a small African community and their destruction in the non-traditional space of a large city. The moral transformation that takes place with Maïmouna's passage from village to city and finally to her dishonorable return exemplifies fitna. Not only is the city fitna, but Maïmouna's

\(^1\) Allen 281.
illness and subsequent disfiguration are the divine retribution for the fitna of Maïmouna’s youth and beauty.

The discourses of Maghrebian writers such as Chraïbi, Boudjedra and Serhane create narrative spaces exemplified by female submission and objectification. Their discourses, narrated by young males reveal a universe in which the female being is defined by the traditional and divinely sanctioned roles of nurturer and procreator. While the narrators recount the suffering and social neglect of the character of the mother, the authors do succeed in projecting an image of the socialized female being who confronts and defies the traditional socio-spatial hierarchy.

By breaking the traditional boundaries of space, Chraïbi’s mother characters challenge society, participating, at the same time, in a re-definition of their social being. The rupture with social realities in Boudjedra’s and Serhane’s narratives is not through an individualistic expression of the female self, but through a narrative of overt sexuality and male sexual depravity. In emphasizing female submission along with male baseness in implementing boundaries of sexual behavior, these writers clearly demonstrate unbridled male hypocrisy and social injustice which are at the root of the patriarchal system of spatial structuring. The discussion of male sexual desire and of male will to subjugate is used by these writers to break traditional and socio-religious taboos.
The discourses of female writers while varied, also announce social transmutation. The traditional and submissive discourse of Mariama Bâ contains a vague promise of change with the following generation, that is with a change in attitude and social consciousness of Ramatoulaye's children. Assia Djebar, along with depicting the suffering of the female characters, also describes their strength and conviction as individual beings inadvertently involved in a socio-political struggle.

The discourses of Aminata Sow Fall have been criticized for being anti-feminist, however, many of her female characters are actively subversive². While Salla Niang is an example of a woman with socio-political status capable of fitna, she is marginalized and exists only on the fringes of 'normal' social space. The configurations of space and social condemnation of 'empowered' female characters that take place in the representative universe of Sow Fall's narratives mirror the social realities of Senegalese society, making her discourses neither feminist nor anti-feminist. As a social-realist, Sow Fall does not engage in ideological polemics and her female characters do not expound on the social rights of women.

While these discourses are linked by a dominant religious ideology, the influence of traditional African societies is apparent in most Senegalese narrative discourses. The freedom of movement of the female characters, the lack of discussion on

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veiling as well as a tolerance of female sexual liberty (Penda) which are depicted in Senegalese discourses do not exist in the Maghrebian literature we have discussed.

Overshadowed by Arabic cultural influences and traditional practices, the suppressed female characters in Maghrebian discourses struggle with the infinite layers of their confinement beginning with the fabric of their hijâbs. The hidden female and her repressed sexuality are, consequently, brought forth in the production of highly eroticized discourses which quite often verge on the sexually perverse and the socially forbidden.

Literature, according to Aminata Sow Fall, is a 'mirror of the cultural soul of a people'\(^3\), and the role of the writer is to portray the social problems, conflicts and contradictions that are manifest in a society under mutation\(^4\). The narrative spatial boundaries as well as the spatial transformations portrayed by African Muslim writers are analogous to the actual structuring of a Muslim society. While Senegalese discourse may differ from the Moroccan in the creation of a literary microcosm and the literary treatment of the female being, the narrative space is implicitly dominated by Qur'ânic doctrine. The Divine Word, contains the perfect regulations for all aspects of a socialized existence and is, therefore, at the

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foundation of all cultural production. If Islamic doctrine is the fundamental element in the production of narrative spaces by francophone African Muslim authors, then we wish to conclude this study by proposing some areas of study relevant for a cultural discourse analysis of the Muslim female character.

Remaining within the domain of francophone African literature, a comparison of literary marital spaces produced in an Islamic cultural context with that of a Jewish cultural context would be of interest. The status of the female being as well as the patriarchal hierarchies in the works of the Jewish Tunisian writer, Albert Memmi, could be compared with the work of not only Muslim Maghrebian writers but also of Senegalese authors. One obvious study would be an analysis of interracial marriage and marital spaces in Agar by Memmi and O! Pays mon beau peuple by Sembène. Representations of the female in narrative discourses by Muslim authors could also be compared with texts produced in a Christian cultural context, such as the narratives of the Cameroonian writer Calixthe Beyala.

Moving beyond the boundaries of francophone Africa to encompass literatures from African Muslim countries, that is, countries where a majority of the population is Muslim, comparative studies of francophone discourses with the writings of the anglophone Somali, Nuruddin Farah, and the Arabic

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6 Ousmane Sembène, O! Pays mon beau peuple (Dakar: Amiot-Dumont, 1957).
discourses of the Egyptian, Nawal El-Saadawi, are a possibility. One could proceed from anglophone Africa, across the Arab countries and beyond, to reach a level of analysis where a comparison of Ali Ghalem’s *Une femme pour mon fils* and *The Bride* by Bapsi Sidhwa would not only be plausible but could also be relevant for a comprehensive study of female ontology in narrative spaces constructed upon a religious specific cultural ideology.

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